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Kaye

'I'VE HAD ENOUGH'

Judy

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90
Why Sophie's husband went the extra mile

WELCOME!

Happy New Year! 2023 has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? As everyone knows, January is when we all start thinking about changes that would make us happier – and this tends to go hand in hand with making resolutions. For most of us – a whopping 95%, according to research – these resolutions are fitness based. It's definitely true for me, apart from that one year I vowed to start looking after my cuticles (it didn't last). And if it's No.1 on your list, you're in luck, as this week's bumper issue is packed with 23 pages dedicated to the New Year Shape-Up – we've got low-calorie recipes, exercises that put a smile on your face (no, not that one!) and celebs sharing their keep-fit secrets. But if that's not for you, don't worry – we've still got plenty of everything else to enjoy, from heartbreaking real life to bargain fashion and beauty buys. We've also got brilliant new Homes pages – turn to p68 for a look! Enjoy, and have a great week!

KIRA AGASS, EDITOR

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HIGHS, LOWS & *shock confessions*

Full of ups, downs and revelations, 2022 was quite a year for the Loose Ladies

Highs

CHARLENE DOWN UNDER

Following Frankie Bridge's spell in *I'm a Celebrity...* 2021, fellow Loose Woman Charlene White joined the show in the Australian jungle. Although she was eliminated first, leaving on day 13, the 42-year-old certainly left an impression as the camp's matriarch.

STARTING CONVERSATIONS

A panel switch up in May saw the ladies swap their seats with Vernon Kay, 48, *Strictly*'s Johannes Radebe, 35, rugby international Mike Tindall MBE, 44, and radio host Roman Kemp, 29, who talked about the importance of men speaking out about their mental health, no doubt helping thousands of others to get talking.

Man talk: Vernon, Johannes, Mark and Roman

Ruth, back with her 'TV son' Rylan

RUTH'S THIS MORNING RETURN

The summer saw Ruth Langsford's return to ITV's *This Morning*. The 62-year-old announced the news, sharing, 'Excited to be reunited with my TV son Rylan.' And although her hubby Eamonn, 62, was missing, fans were beyond delighted. It's nice to have you back, Ruth!

Lows

Split: Coleen and Michael

COLEEN ALONE AGAIN

After two failed marriages, it seemed like Coleen Nolan had finally found her happily ever after with boyfriend Michael Jones, 58. But it wasn't meant to be, as the pair called it quits in April. Ever the romantic, Coleen, 57, previously admitted, 'I love love so I'm always open to meeting somebody and falling in love and it's lovely.' Could 2023 be her year?

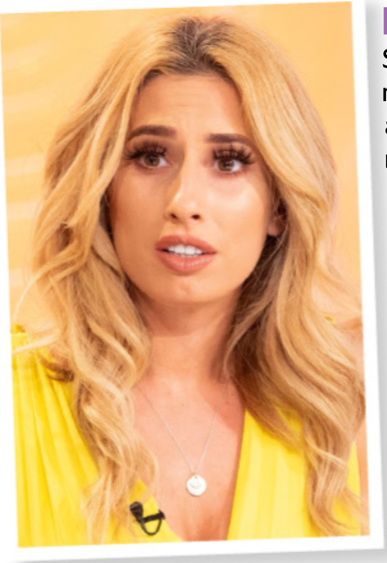
WORDS: ARIANA LONGSON. PHOTOS: ALAMY, INSTAGRAM @COLEEN_NOLAN, GETTY, ITV, SHUTTERSTOCK

Confessions

Coy: Linda and Mark

KEEPING THINGS COVERED

She's been married to Mark Dunford for 32 years but Linda Robson shocked fans by revealing he'd never seen her naked. Linda, 64, who has two children with Mark as well as a daughter from a previous relationship, said, 'My mum is Catholic and we never saw her undressed – I go in the bathroom. My kids have seen me undressed but my husband hasn't.'



LONELY STACEY

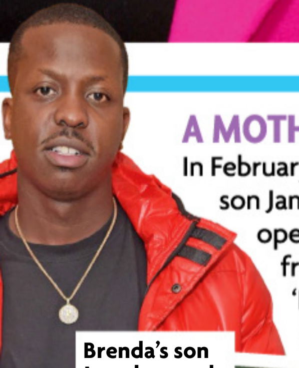
Stacey Solomon may boast 5.4 million Instagram followers but away from social media she's not as popular as you'd think. The star, 33, admitted, 'I don't have many mates. I've only got a couple of mates from school and a couple of mates I've made in the last 10 years,' adding that she doesn't 'even have time to nurture those friendships very much'.

NADIA'S DIAGNOSIS

In November, Nadia Sawalha announced she'd recently been diagnosed with ADHD. The 58-year-old explained, 'I couldn't accept there was some reason for all this chaos I've experienced throughout my life.' She urged viewers, 'If any of this resonates with you, just investigate it a bit further. I have started medication and things are really changing for me… The point is you are [at] very high risk of addictive behaviour. It's not just silly people running around doing silly things.'

KAYE: 'I'VE HAD ENOUGH'

It looks like we won't be seeing as much of Kaye Adams in 2023. The panellist, who recently turned 60, confessed, 'I've had enough of working from early in the morning until late at night. I want to finish my work at a reasonable time and have some free time.'



Brenda's son Jamal passed away this year

Brenda: Remembering my son Jamal

A MOTHER'S LOSS

In February Brenda Edwards' world fell apart when her son Jamal died suddenly at the age of 31. Bravely opening up about his passing, Brenda, 53, told friend and fellow panellist Coleen Nolan, 'I was with him. His sister was with us. We were all at home… It was sudden and it was unexpected and he went into cardiac arrest and he passed with me holding his hand… I get a little bit of comfort from knowing that I was with him'. We're still thinking of you, Brenda.

ROBBED OF A GONG

Fans and the Loose Women alike were gutted when the show missed out on a win at the National Television Awards. They were up for the best daytime show but lost to fellow ITV favourite *This Morning*.

It wasn't the ladies' night

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worth £9.99!
T&Cs apply. See p56
DIANA
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William & Kate
KING & QUEEN IN WAITING
Will greater duty threaten their happy family?
CHARLES
From boy in torment to modern monarch
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AT ALL GOOD NEWSAGENTS AND SUPERMARKETS

KEEPING UP WITH THE ROYALS

Discover the biggest professional and personal events lined up in the royal diary for 2023

PRINCE HARRY
SPARE

10 JANUARY

HARRY'S TELL-ALL BOOK

The Duke of Sussex's highly anticipated memoir was expected at the end of 2022, before being postponed as a mark of respect following the Queen's death. It's now set to be released next week. Despite not yet being available to buy, Harry's new book, *Spare* – which follows the release of The Sussexes' Netflix docuseries – has already created headlines. Truth bombs and more upset for the Royal Family at the hands of Harry and Meghan seem to be something that the King and Prince William will have to learn to live with.

6 MAY

CORONATION DAY

In a state event, King Charles III and his wife, Camilla, Queen Consort will be officially crowned on their coronation day – which is also the King's grandson Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor's fourth birthday. The ceremony falls on a Saturday, meaning the following Monday (8 May) will be a bank holiday across the UK, enabling the country to come together and celebrate.

A VERY ROYAL BIRTHDAY

His second birthday as monarch will be a big one for King Charles III as he celebrates turning 75. As King there's no doubt he'll be spoiled and while plans of a party are yet to be announced, we're sure at least some of the Royal Family won't let the momentous occasion go by without a get-together.

14 NOVEMBER

22 JULY

DOUBLE DIGITS

In July the Prince and Princess of Wales' eldest son, Prince George – who's second in line to the throne – will finally reach double digits when he turns 10. As the King's grandson we're sure he already has everything his heart desires, but that doesn't mean he won't be unwrapping presents fit for a prince.

8 SEPTEMBER

A YEAR WITHOUT OUR QUEEN

On 8 September it will have been a year since the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, who died at the age of 96. Parliament rejected a petition – which reached 100,000 signatures – for the anniversary of her death to be made into a national bank holiday, but the country will find a way to remember Her Majesty and all that she achieved during her 70-year reign.

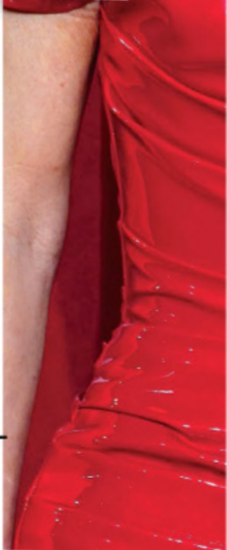
WORDS: ARIANA LONGSON. PHOTOS: GETTY

PETER AND JUNIOR ANDRE

With *Mysterious Girl* singer Peter Andre as his dad, it's no wonder Junior is already taking the music industry by storm. The 17-year-old released his first single, *Slide*, in June and it topped the UK iTunes chart within hours. Proud dad Pete, who is also Junior's manager, said, 'The first song was great but you guys have heard nothing yet.'

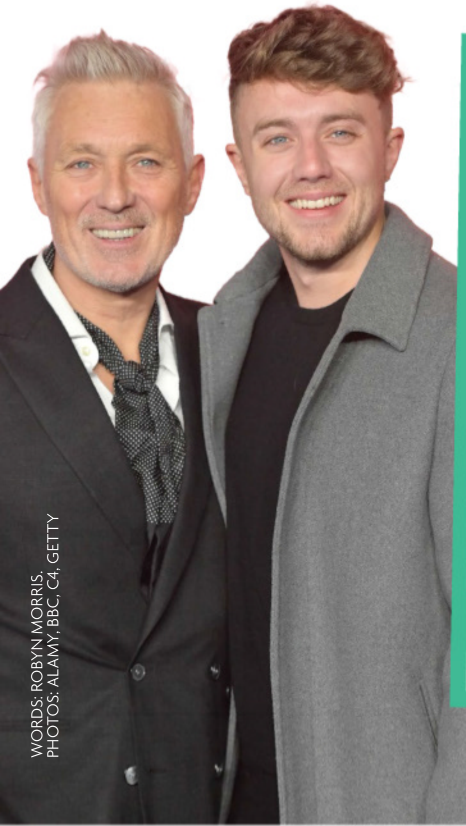
JEFF AND BOBBY BRAZIER

As well as being a model, Bobby, 19, now has a role in *Eastenders*. Dad Jeff, who rose to fame on *Shipwrecked*, has revealed how proud he is of him, gushing, 'I knew Bobby would end up in the industry as he has all the ingredients.' However, he admitted he also worries that Bobby might suffer the pitfalls of fame, like his late mum, Jade Goody. One thing we know for sure is that Jade would be beaming with pride.



THE NEXT GENERATION

These celeb kids are following in their famous folks' footsteps



MARTIN AND ROMAN KEMP

Presenting the *Breakfast* show on Capital FM every day and having taken part in *I'm A Celebrity...* in 2019, Roman is almost more of a household name than his famous dad nowadays. The two of them have even appeared on *Celebrity Gogglebox* together, with Martin saying that it's 'a joy' working with his 29-year-old son. He added, 'He's a complete perfectionist and watching him shine in a room always makes me feel so proud.'

MICHAEL AND GEMMA OWEN

The Owen family hit headlines earlier this year when 19-year-old Gemma made it to the final of *Love Island*. The footballer's daughter now has over two million Instagram followers and has signed a six-figure deal with fashion giant Pretty Little Thing. Doesn't look like she needs Dad's money any more!

WORDS: ROBYN MORRIS.
PHOTOS: ALAMY, BBC, C4, GETTY

AMANDA HOLDEN AND ALEXA HUGHES

Back in the summer, Heart Radio's Amanda revealed that her eldest daughter had taken an interest in *Love Island*, admitting, 'This is becoming a bit of an obsession with my teenage daughter at home now and I'm like, "You ain't ever going on it, Alexa!"' But the 16-year-old has already been signed to top modelling agency Storm Management, has her own Instagram account and has started accompanying her mum on red carpets. So we're sure she'll be just as famous as Amanda in no time!

KATE WINSLET AND MIA HONEY THREAPLETON

Like her famous mum, 22-year-old Mia is an actor who seems destined for great things. She recently played Kate's daughter in C4's *I Am Ruth* and while she's sure to have taken acting tips from her mum, Kate says Mia wasn't cast because of who her mother is. 'She has a different surname so she slipped under the radar,' Kate explained. 'And the people who cast her didn't know she was my daughter, and that was important for her self-esteem.'

KATE AND LILA MOSS

Just like her mum, Lila began modelling at just 14 years old. But while Kate is one of the most successful models in the world, Lila has revealed her mum dissuaded her from joining the industry. 'My mum always put me off [modelling],' she said. 'She was always like, "If you wanna do it, you can, but I wouldn't recommend it."' Luckily, Lila has her mum's guidance and seems to be going from strength to strength.

SAD AND LONELY

The star openly admits that she's feeling low without her family around her

With the excitement of Christmas behind us and the long winter nights drawing in, it's no wonder so many of us feel the January blues. And Judy Finnigan is no exception. Speaking about her mental health recently, Judy admitted she's been 'sad' and has opened up about 'empty nest syndrome' and why she hates being alone – without her family.

'After four-and-a-half months bunking up with Mum and Dad while builders finished doing up their house, our daughter, son-in-law and tiny new granddaughter have finally quit Madeley Mansions (or Finnigan's Folly as I call it when I'm feeling militant),' Judy, 74, said. 'And oh, how I miss them. Or to be accurate, how I miss the baby. She's three months old now, and it's the first time I've spent every day with a newborn since I gave birth to her mummy 35 years ago.'

Judy, along with husband Richard Madeley, 66, has made no secret about just how much they love their new grandchild. Their daughter Chloe, 35, gave birth to little girl Bodhi in August, whom she shares with ex-rugby player husband James Haskell, 37. The couple lived with them in the lead-up to Christmas while their own house was being done up – meaning that Judy and Richard got to form an extra special bond with the baby.

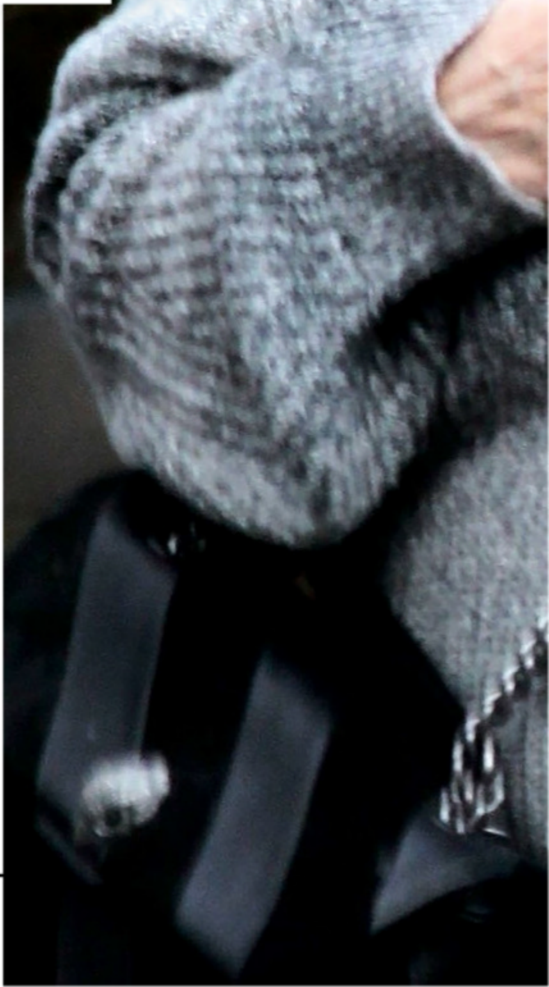
'It's the strangest, most wonderful experience to live with a tiny person you adore as her grandmother, not her exhausted, anxious mama,' Judy explained. 'You see the miracle of new life in a completely different way – full of joy, without a smidgen of worry. It's also a revelation to see my daughter blossom in motherhood. I have never seen her so happy, and I've never been so proud.'

Chloe Madeley and her young daughter Bodhi

Out and about: Judy Finnigan and Richard Madeley

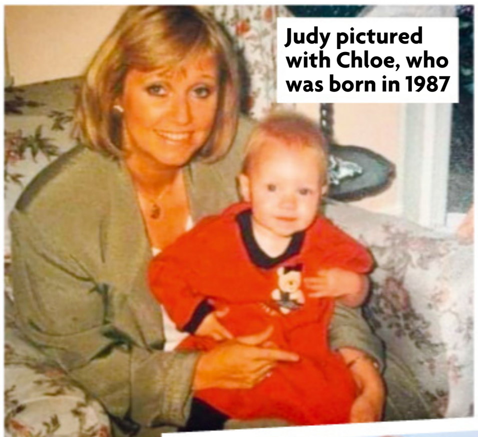
MOTHER-DAUGHTER BOND

Of course, little Bodhi isn't Judy's first grandchild. Richard and Judy's son Jack has a little boy, while one of Judy's two boys from her marriage to David Henshaw has two little girls. But the star has admitted it feels special when it's your daughter having a baby. 'Chloe's my only daughter – my other grandchildren were born to my sons – and it's different when it's your daughter,' she said. 'You just feel so close to her. I can still remember her at that age, and to see her



WORDS: ANNA MATHESON. PHOTOS: BACKGRID, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK, INSTAGRAM @MADELEYCHLOE

> ‘OH, HOW I MISS THEM. OR TO BE ACCURATE, HOW I MISS THE BABY’



Judy pictured with Chloe, who was born in 1987

Judy and Richard on *This Morning* with their grandson Kit

with her own baby now, I think she’s fantastic.’

However, like many of us who see family over Christmas, the new year can often bring a period of isolation. It’s hard not to feel lonely when the decorations are packed away and the family have departed.

GRIPPED BY NOSTALGIA

It wouldn’t be the first time in recent months that Judy has acknowledged feeling sad about her own children flying the nest, either. In October, she said, ‘I felt so sad on Halloween that I made Richard drive me around the neighbourhood so I could see the astonishingly elaborate displays of ghosts, monsters and werewolves in people’s front gardens... Richard thought I’d gone a bit mad, saying, ‘This is weird – you don’t normally do this. What’s up with you?’ Judy continued. ‘All I knew was I’d been gripped by a sudden violent nostalgia. I used to love our Halloween when the children were small.’

The presenter turned author added, ‘Those were the happiest days of my life, and I suppose what hit me was an acute case of empty nest syndrome.’ The star has admitted she’s feeling her age, even describing herself as ‘old and faded’.

Still, it seems that Judy is determined to get out of her recent funk and make the best of life, as she added, ‘You can’t turn back time; all you can do is make more memories for the future.’ We’re sure 2023 will bring plenty of opportunities, Judy!

Wishlist

All the best fashion, beauty and home buys we have our eye on this week

EASY UPDATE

Refresh your home with a gorgeous dried-flower arrangement. Vase, £17.99, table, £39.99, trinket dish, £9.99, mini vase, £8.99, all H&M Home. Eucalyptus, £39.99, Beards & Daisies at H&M Home

GET COSY

A soft fluffy bath robe is an everyday must-have. Dressing gown, £16, sizes s-xl, Tu Clothing

DESIGNER DECOR

A candle that doubles up as a decorative ornament. Candle, £9, Habitat

TOASTY TOES

Fleece-lined for full comfort. Slippers, £16, footwearstudio.co.uk

GARNIER SkinActive
NUTRI BOMB
Milky Tissue Mask

HYDRATION HIT

For a 15-minute pamper. Garnier Nutri Bomb Tissue Mask, £2.95, Superdrug

PRETTY PASTELS

Perfect for layering, this coat is also a great price. Coat, £29.99, sizes s-xl, Zara

LIMITED EDITION

PERFECT YOUR POUT

Make room in your make-up bag. Iconic Mini Lip Trio Kit, £29, Charlotte Tilbury

COMPILED BY: BECKY JOINER-O'RIORDAN

THE IT KNIT

Elevate your loungewear.
Jumper, £22, sizes 8-24,
Tu Clothing

CHEMICAL FREE
CLEAN SKIN MADE MODERN
GLOW
FACE HALO
GLOW SKIN SET

JUST ADD WATER

Cleanse the day away.
Face Halo Glow Set, £20,
lookfantastic.com

TREAT YOURSELF

STANDOUT SHADE

Stylish slumber guaranteed.
Pyjamas, £35, sizes 6-18,
Michelle Keegan at Very

BEAT THE CHILL

Snuggle season is here; you won't want to take these off.
Socks, £8.99, New Look

BEAUTY SLEEP

A hint of luxury at bedtime.
Sleep mask, £6,
beautybay.com

THE RIGHT STRIPE

Great for laid-back weekend looks.
Shirt, £29.99, sizes xs-xxl, Lindex

The Ordinary.

GET THE GLOW

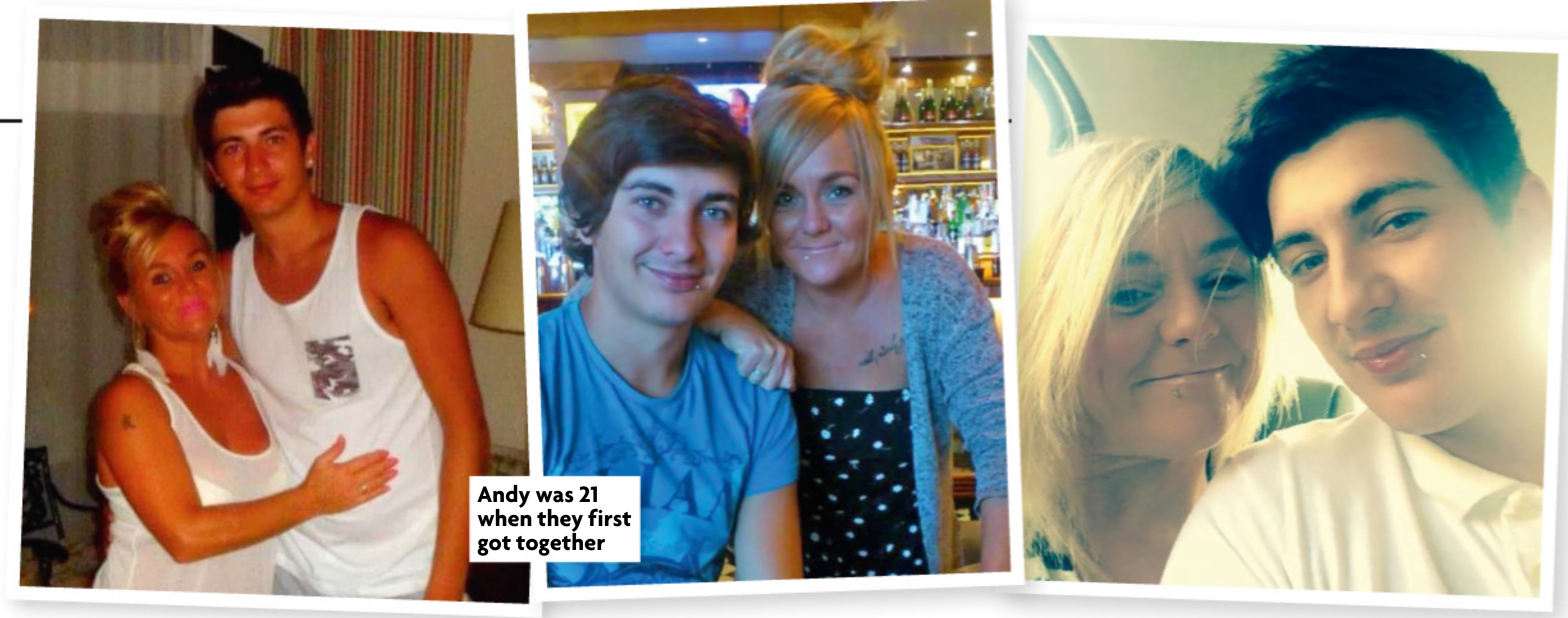
A natural mix for brighter skin.
The Ordinary Rose Hip Seed Oil, £9, Boots

SOFT TOUCH

Add texture to your sofa with on-trend bouclé fabrics.
Cushion, £9, Wilko

SHELF APPEAL

For your favourite flowers.
Vases, large, £18, small, £16, both Next



Andy was 21 when they first got together

I'M IN LOVE WITH THE BOY I USED TO BABYSIT

Kelli Regini, 51, tried to fight her feelings but she couldn't help falling for a man 21 years younger

WORDS: JACK FALBER. PHOTOS: MEDAVIA

Pushing open the front door, I heard a low rumbling sound like thunder coming from outside. But spotting a flash of dark hair and a filthy red T-shirt, I knew that sound wasn't the weather. It was Andy, one of our neighbour's sons, running over the cars parked in our street. 'Stop it! I've told you about this before!' I shouted at him. But Andy just shrugged and ran off.

This was typical of Andy. Ever since he'd moved into the house opposite mine, I'd known he was going to be trouble. His parents had divorced and it was left to his dad to look after Andy and his four siblings, as well as hold down a job.

'Listen, I don't mind helping out,' I told Andy's dad Bill one day in 2002. 'You've got your hands full, Andy's welcome to come over any time to play with my two boys.'

Married, with two sons of my own, then eight and six, and a job at the local school, I hoped I could bring some stability into Andy's life. And soon, it was like having another child. Andy, 10, was often popping in and out of our house with his older sister, and I was forever tripping over his toys and shoes.

A GOOD KID

'You can be a right tearaway at times,' I told him. 'But I know that deep down, you're a good kid.'

'Thanks Kelli. Have you got any more biscuits?' he asked, wiping crumbs from his mouth with the grubby sleeve of his jumper. I laughed as I let out a sigh.

I tried my best with Andy but his behaviour was often out of control. By the time he was 13, he had been expelled from three schools. And when he was 14, he was caught taking his dad's car for a joyride. Still, he remained a big part of our family.

A year later, my marriage had broken down and I'd met a new man, Simon*, online. 'Who's this Simon bloke then?' Andy, then 15, asked when I explained that my new man had invited me on a drive.

'Well, I'm coming with you,' he said, insisting on chaperoning me on our first date. 'I want to make sure you're OK.'

'Honestly Andy, there's no need – I'm a grown woman,' I said. But Andy wouldn't have any of it, and when he got in the back seat of the car as Simon and I went on a

Andy was often round at Kelli's

AGE 30
AGE 51

Kelli and Andy couldn't fight their feelings

drive, I felt oddly safe and reassured.

Simon and I started a relationship and I couldn't have been happier. My kids were content and Andy seemed to be finally growing up a bit.

GIRL MAD

By the time he was 18, he'd left his tearaway years behind him. He was just like any other teenage boy – completely girl mad – so I didn't think much of it when he made a few flirtatious comments to me now and again.

'I go to sleep dreaming about you,' he told me one evening, with a cheeky wink. 'You weirdo!' I laughed it off. 'Get out of here.' Andy was like one of my children. Besides, I was very happy with Simon.

Over the next couple of years, Andy seemed to have a new head on his shoulders. He was sensible, working hard as a waiter, and I started to see him as a friend, rather than one of my children's friends. In 2014, a group of us arranged some Christmas drinks in Norwich. Andy, then 21, was joining us. 'It's going to be a big night, and it's too far to get a taxi – the fare will be extortionate,' he said.

None of us wanted to drive home so we booked hotel rooms for the night. That night, we partied and drained glass after glass of Christmas drinks. And after way too much festive cheer and stumbling back to the hotel together, Andy and I ended up sleeping together.

'Oh my God, what have I done?' I thought, as I woke up the next morning with a stinking hangover – and Andy lying naked in the bed next to me. I was mortified. I was 42, and Andy was 21 years younger than me. It felt wrong, yet there seemed to be a spark between us.

'It was a mistake,' I said, and Andy nodded in agreement. 'Yep, just a silly drunken mistake,' he said. Andy and I vowed never to speak of it again and to remain friends, but just two months later, Andy and I shared another night together.

Once the passion was ignited between us, we felt powerless to stop it. And soon, it became a regular thing.

But it wasn't an easy decision to start a relationship with Andy. I feared what people would think and say – if it was a man 21 years older than a young woman, I knew it would be frowned upon. And the fact I'd known him since he was a child – what if people thought I'd groomed him?

'HE MADE A FEW FLIRTATIOUS COMMENTS'

I tortured myself over and over. There was no way that I could deny it, it was strange that I'd known him since he was four, but the fact was Andy was an adult now, so was I, and we had unexpectedly fallen for each other.

For two years I went back and forth on my decision, never knowing what was the right thing to do.

But whenever I saw Andy, we'd end up in bed. 'I just want to be with you, Kelli,' Andy confessed one day. 'I'm tired of all the sneaking around. I want to commit to you, for us to be together properly.' As I looked at him, I felt my heart swell with love. But the age gap between us was still holding me back.

FELT NATURAL

Only, when my relationship with Simon broke down soon after, all I could think about was Andy. So, by Christmas 2018, we rekindled our relationship. It felt so natural straight away. The children were shocked when we first told them but they loved Andy, and they soon got used to him being around. Of course, not everyone was happy for us but I ignored their whispers and judgement that it would never last – and the fact that sometimes I was mistaken for Andy's mum!

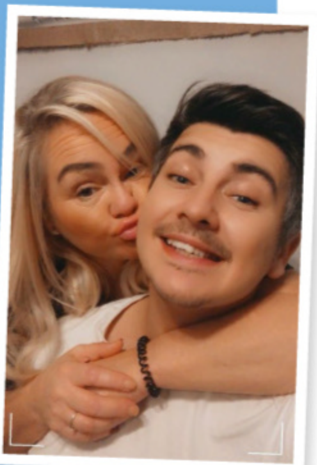
'FOR TWO YEARS I WENT BACK AND FORTH'

We have been together ever since and I've never been happier. Yes, Andy's 21 years younger than me but, if anything, he's the OAP in our relationship. We joke that all he wants to do is put his slippers on for a cosy night in!

Some people will judge our relationship, but if you can look beyond the age gap, Andy and I have something very special.

'WE DO GET COMMENTS'

Andy, 30, says: 'Kelli was the prominent woman in my life growing up. I used to go round and play with her son. When I hit my teens, me and all my mates used to think she was hot and we always wanted to go round there. She was very attractive. She was with someone when we had our one-night stand and I felt very guilty and confused. We do get comments, but I don't let it bother me.'



DAWN NEESOM MIND OF MY OWN

The *Woman's Own* columnist has her say on predictions, goblins and Dry January

GOBLIN MODE

As you read this, look around. Are you still in bed? Are there piles of clothes strewn across the floor? Crumbs in the bed? Do you even care? You might be in 'goblin mode' – chosen by the public as the 2022 Oxford Word of the Year.

According to Oxford University Press, this term refers to a type of behaviour that is 'unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly or greedy, in a way that rejects social norms or expectations.'

Or as those with half a brain cell call it, 'lockdown mode'. You know, where social interaction was limited and 'working' from home meant you could get away with sartorial murder.

As we head into the new year, we've all reverted to hardworking little pixies. Haven't we?

Though to be fair, that onesie was quite comfy and the Jeremy Vine show is on telly...

PHOTOS: GETTY

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

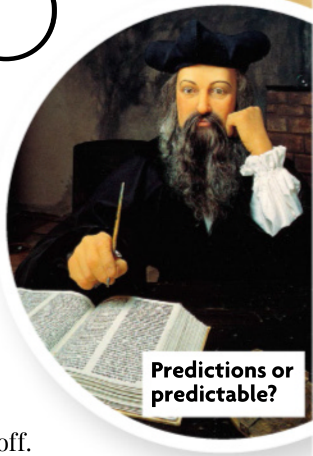
As 2023 begins, let's try to decipher some of Nostradamus' predictions

Congratulations, you made it. Just. It's 2023 and a shiny new year awaits us. Absolutely no idea what happened to 2022 but I think we blinked and missed it. If it's true that time passes faster the older you get, then I expect 2024 to arrive in approximately 10 minutes. Unless it's on strike, obviously. In which case, like the trains/post/ambulance/UncleTomCobley it will be delayed.

But I digress. Around 500 years ago a bloke called Michel de Nostredame wrote a book called *Les Propheties*. Now, he was French so he may well have had a good liquid lunch or a sleepless night triggered by onions and garlic. We'll never know. But his book featured 942 forecasts that seemingly predicted the future. These days we call him Nostradamus and try really hard not to think that the eerily accurate stuff he wrote was anything more than a *du vin, du pain et du fromage* inspired bad dream.

For a start, the book's contents made predictions about Hitler's rise to power and the French Revolution.

Now, although Nostradamus' main job was astrologer, he also appeared to have pretty good vision of human stars, such as American President John F Kennedy. He said he'd be bumped off. And he also hinted at the 9/11 terror attacks on the World Trade Center in New York – a place he'd obviously never been to. And before planes were invented.



Predictions or predictable?

Funnily enough, Nostradamus was a little cagey, it has to be said. He never actually mentioned dates (not even centuries) and used such, er, 'vague' language that you can pretty much read what you want into any of it. But why let the facts ruin a good fantasy?

In any case, reading between our ancient French chum's somewhat hazy lines, 2023 isn't shaping up too well – though he wasn't stupid enough to mention 2023 specifically, obviously.

'WHY LET FACTS RUIN FANTASY?'

So let's kick off with 'Seven months great war, people dead of evil-doing. Rouen, Evreux shall not fall to the King.'

Me neither. But to some (who possibly should step away from the sherry) this refers to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

IT'S ALL IN A NAME

Experts have listed 'unique' baby names for 2023. There's maximalism – posh speak for long and pretentious – and includes Amadeus, Cleopatra and, er, Zebedee. Trend two is retro, so Bobbie, Frankie and, um, Sloane. Next up is gilded – inspired by the sun – see Apollo and Sunny. Makes me glad to be a boring old Dawn – even with all the 'up at the crack of' jokes!

NO DRY JANUARY FOR ME

We're already well into 2023 and those New Year's resolutions should be going down a storm. And as all the great and the good are giving up booze, I'd just like to report that the wine, gin and beer are really going down a storm this end too. Literally. Everything in moderation. Cheers!

Even though Evreux is a village in, er, France.

Next up, our cheerful chappy went on about a 'Celestial fire on the Royal edifice'. You getting global warming and destruction from that one? Nope, nor me.

Somewhat more intriguingly, 'light on Mars falling' was also mentioned. With SpaceX founder and Twitter owner Elon Musk suggesting humans will land on and colonise the red planet by 2029, maybe this is food for thought. Or maybe it's just a prediction that Mars chocolate bars would get smaller. Because, come on, they really have, haven't they?

The Bible was pretty good at predicting hell and damnation so why shouldn't Nostradamus have a go too? What do you make of 'So high will the bushel of wheat rise, that man will be eating his fellow man?' Cost of living crisis, obviously! As much as I've worried about the heating versus eating dilemma, I still haven't contemplated eating the neighbours. Yet.

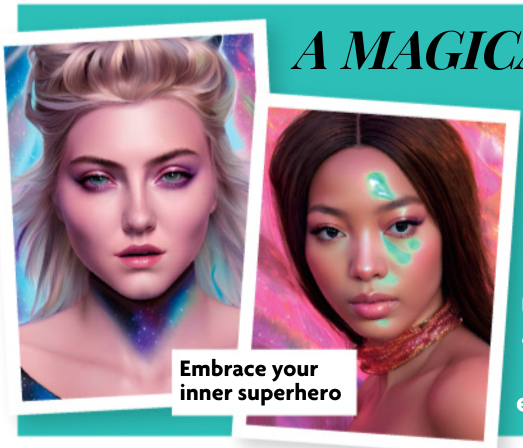
Next up, we have 'Like the sun the head shall sear the shining sea: The Black Sea's living fish shall all but boil.' Code Red global warming, again? Or possibly that lovely fish supper on the Med? You decide.

My favourite – and a safe bet for every year since Nostradamus wrote his book in 1555 – is 'Sooner and later you will see great changes made, dreadful horrors and vengeances.'

A little bit more imagination with that one, please. Things will change and might be a bit rubbish? Mate, we've all been there and written that book.

'THINGS MIGHT BE RUBBISH'

A MAGICAL MAKEOVER MASH-UP


Embrace your inner superhero

Always the last to catch up with techie things but artificial intelligence image editing apps – which take your photo and make you look like a movie superhero – are addictive, to say the least.

So many mates have ended up resembling a cross between a *Lord of The Rings* heroine/Disney Princess/Renaissance portrait that I must admit I was tempted.

Then I read a bit more about it and realised these apps seem to harvest so much information – it's only surprising they don't ask for your inside leg measurement.

Look, this is all probably totally harmless and just good fun but I didn't go there. And this is nothing to do with the fact that I ended up looking like Zelda from *Terrahawks*. Honestly.

What's your opinion? Tell Dawn on Twitter @DawnNeesom

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£18, sizes xs-xl,
Primark

FLOWER POWER
£14.99, sizes xxs-xl, H&M

BALLOON SLEEVES
£19.50, sizes 8-20,
F&F Clothing

PASTEL LINES
£10, sizes 8-22,
studio.co.uk

TANGERINE DREAM
£17.99, sizes xxs-xl, H&M

CITRUS TWIST
£18. Sizes xs-xl,
George at Asda

NICELY NEUTRAL
£16, sizes 8-22,
studio.co.uk

GREY MATTER
£19.99, sizes xxs-xl,
H&M

COMPILED BY: JULIE PLAYER

jumpers

LIGHTWEIGHT LAYER
£18, sizes 6-22,
Next

IN A SWIRL
£16, sizes s-xl, Pep&Co
at Poundland

ANIMAL PRINT
£17.50, sizes
6-20, M&S

CLASSIC CABLE
£18, sizes xs-xl,
George at Asda

BOBBLE TRIM
£18, sizes s-xxl,
Peacocks

SUNSET SHADES
£19.99, sizes xxs-xl H&M

BOLD STRIPE
£18, 8-22,
Tu Clothing

GO FOR GREEN
£14, sizes xs-xl,
Primark

MELLOW YELLOW
£16, sizes 8-20,
Peacocks

THINK PINK
£18, sizes 10-28,
Bonmarché

ALL SQUARE
£17, sizes s-xl,
Matalan

WE'LL FIGHT THIS TOGETHER

Cindy Walker, 35, is undergoing cancer treatment alongside her three-year-old daughter

When my daughter was born, I imagined all the wonderful things we'd do together. Dressing up, playing with dollies, going on shopping trips and girls' days at the spa. Instead, I found myself fighting for my life, hooked up to machines and undergoing chemotherapy, while my precious little girl was also fighting for hers.

In early 2020, I was checking Facebook when I noticed a message from a name that I didn't recognise. 'I think I'm your cousin,' it read. Explaining she lived in Canada, she said she was related to my dad's side of the family. Rather than researching her family tree, she'd got in touch with important news. 'There is a cancer gene mutation that runs in the family, you may want to get yourself checked,' she said.

I was shocked, but knew it wasn't something I could ignore. As a wife to Anthony, then 37, and mum to Lily, two, I needed to know if I was at high risk of developing cancer. Ten years earlier, my dad, Kenneth, had been diagnosed with a sarcoma on the left-hand side of his chest. Thankfully, the cancer was treatable and, after undergoing radiotherapy, he'd been healthy ever since.

But the message explained that the TP53 gene mutation that ran in our family can cause cancer cells to grow and spread anywhere in the body, and that there was a 50/50 chance of inheriting the mutated gene from someone who is a carrier.

GENE TEST

I contacted my doctor and, eventually, Dad's blood was genetically tested. He was found to be a carrier and it meant there was a 50% chance I was too. Dad was understandably upset, but he was more concerned about what it meant for me.

Doctors didn't want to test me, as they didn't want to cause constant worry if I tested positive – instead agreed I should have regular check-ups. But at my first MRI scan in June 2022, they found a mass on my breast. 'We'll need to perform an ultrasound,' the doctor said. I had to wait an agonising four weeks for my next appointment. 'What if I'm dying?' I worried to Anthony, as I watched our little girl twirling around the room, singing songs from *Frozen*. 'I can't leave Lily without a mum,' I sobbed, cuddling her.

But on 21 July, my worst fear was confirmed. 'It's cancer,' the doctor said. The 2cm lump in my breast had already progressed to grade 2. I was booked in for a lumpectomy, I'd need chemotherapy, and doctors advised a double mastectomy to prevent it from coming back.

I tried to put on a brave face for Lily, telling her that Mummy had poorly boobies. 'The doctors will help me get better,' I said, as she looked up at me with her big brown eyes. But I was so worried – if I'd inherited the mutated gene, there was a chance Lily had it, too. I felt sick thinking about it.

TEA PARTY

With Lily's third birthday coming up, it gave me something happy to focus on. She'd been learning to ride a bike and she loved it, so Anthony and I had bought her a new one as a surprise. Between having surgery to remove my lump and starting chemotherapy, I organised a birthday tea party at home with close friends and family. But on 5 September, just a day

Brave Lily's big smiles

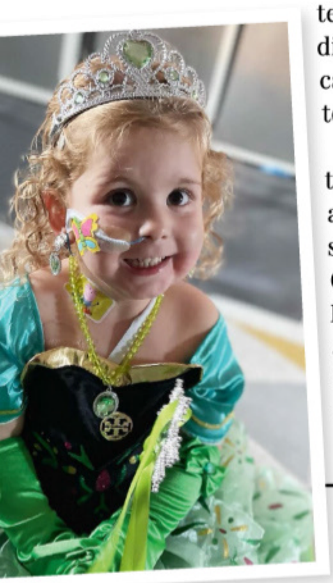
WORDS: FRANCESCA WOODSTOCK

Diagnosed within months of each other

Getting through it as a family

before her birthday, Anthony came running up the stairs. 'There's a weird lump on Lily's leg,' he told me. My heart sank. He told me he'd been putting on Lily's knee pads to take her out on her old bike when he'd spotted a lump the size of a bouncy ball protruding from the calf on her right leg. At around 4cm, it seemed to have popped up out of nowhere. 'I'm taking her to the doctor,' I said.

Although I didn't want to believe it, I just knew it was cancer. 'We'll run some tests,' the doctor agreed, sending us home to enjoy Lily's birthday. But as she opened her presents, blew out her candles and rode around on her new bike, I held back tears. Surely we didn't both have cancer? It was just too cruel.



The next day, the doctor called and told us to go straight to Cramlington Hospital, but after taking some blood we were transferred to the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle.

'We're referring Lily to the oncology ward,' the doctor told me. I didn't need an explanation, I knew exactly what that meant. Cancer was making its way through our family.

DREADED NEWS

For the next few days, Lily underwent ultrasounds, biopsies, MRIs and CT scans, and on 11 September, doctors confirmed the news I'd been dreading – Lily had cancer. Doctors explained she had a rhabdomyosarcoma, a type of cancer that forms in the soft tissue, and she'd need to start chemo immediately. She was too young to understand, so I told her she had a poorly leg but medicine would make it better.

'Mummy needs medicine, too,' I told her. 'For your poorly boobies?' she asked. I smiled and nodded. I wasn't even worried about my own diagnosis anymore. Lily was all that mattered. I was terrified, but Lily was brave enough for both of us, and I drew strength from her.

She was fitted with a tube to administer her medication and another for doctors to take her blood. When I had to leave for my own chemo appointments, Anthony sat with Lily so she was never alone.

Pain coursed through my body as the chemo drugs were administered, and I sobbed at the thought of my little girl enduring the same horrendous side effects. But when I video called Lily, I showed her my tubes. 'We match,' I smiled. Lily laughed as the machine beeped, and told me hers made silly noises, too.

After just one round, Lily's blonde curls started to fall out, and after two weeks, she'd lost all her hair. But Lily was brave and beautiful, and she still loved dressing up in her princess dresses. I knew it wouldn't be long before my own hair fell out, but when the time came I swore to be brave like Lily.

To ensure Lily got the best course of treatment, doctors agreed to test her for the TP53 gene mutation, and when it was confirmed, I tried to look at it in a positive light. She would have regular scans, and she could undergo preventive treatment. In November, Lily had an ovary removed so her eggs could be frozen. If she ever wanted to have kids, her eggs could be screened so that any of her children would be born without the mutation. It was incredible, and it gave me hope that doctors were thinking so far ahead.

> 'THERE'S STILL A LONG WAY TO GO FOR LILY AND ME'

There is still a long way to go for Lily and me. We are both still undergoing chemo and there is a chance we could both get cancer again, but we will be monitored closely.

I'm so grateful to my cousin for getting in touch that day. Although this isn't the life I pictured for me and my daughter, the bond we have is unbreakable and I know we'll get through this together.

24 HOURS IN A&E

As winter takes hold, medics and patients become the stars of a TV docuseries in an emergency department

Ambulances stacked up, patients on trolleys in corridors waiting to be treated and staff working to the point of exhaustion. These are the now-familiar images surrounding emergency departments. In October 2022, a record number (45.2%) of A&E patients were waiting for more than four hours to be seen. And the staffing crisis and working conditions have led to our vital nurses and ambulance staff voting to strike.

So what impact are these huge pressures having on the country's A&E departments? We're about to find out. Cameras have captured the scenes at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham to give an insight into the lives of the staff and the patients they treat.

The footage will be aired on C4 this month in the latest series of *24 Hours in A&E*. To find out more, *Woman's Own* speaks to a member of A&E staff and the wife of a patient who feature in the show.

A&E PAIN Patients face deadly delays as A&E departments endure worst month EVER in July

NHS WAIT HELL 250k patients waited over 12 hours to receive emergency care in England in last year

Ambulance response times for a Category 2 call, such as suspected heart attacks and strokes, rose to over one hour in October 2022, compared to a target of 18 minutes.

*NHS KEY STATISTICS, COMMONSLIBRARY.PARLIAMENT.UK/RESEARCH-BRIEFINGS/CBP-7281
WORDS: MOIRA HOLDEN. PHOTOS: ALAMY, C4, THE SUN/NEWS LICENSING

'I told him I loved him so much'

Flo Lowther, 90, went to A&E with her husband John, 92, when he became breathless. They met in a cafe near M&S, where she worked in the hosiery department, and married in 1951.

Two weeks before our platinum wedding anniversary in October 2021, John became breathless at midnight, and I pulled an emergency cord for the paramedics. I told them I'd need to come too because John suffers from dementia and won't know what's happening.

Tests at the hospital showed that John's kidneys had failed and he had developed sepsis. Viewers will see me being told in the resuscitation unit that there was nothing else the doctors could do. I wasn't aware cameras were there at the time. I was just concentrating on what was happening to us.

I was devastated, but had to keep reassuring John. I didn't want him to know – I told him he'd be going onto a ward. The staff were amazing, helping me to make phone calls to relatives at such an upsetting time.

As we waited to be taken to the ward, John and I talked about how happy we'd been. We didn't have children – we'd wanted a family, but it never happened. We had no distractions and concentrated on ourselves, giving us wonderful memories that I'll cherish forever.

After I left A&E, John was taken to a ward. On the second night the

Flo and John were filmed for the programme

and Emergency
We are Smoke Free
ECEP

The waiting list for hospital treatment rose to a record of seven million patients in September 2022. The 18-week treatment target has not been met since 2016.

There has been huge pressure on hospitals recently

consultant advised me to go home and get some rest. At two o'clock in the morning I got a phone call to say John had passed away. They asked if I wanted to come and see him. I did, so a friend and his wife picked me up and took me in. John was still warm – I cuddled him and told him how much I loved him.

I spoke directly to the camera after his death because I think it's important to know how much I was grateful for the way I was helped and looked after in the hospital on that day. The staff there were amazing in our hour of need, and I hope viewers will see that.

The cake for our platinum wedding became the cake for John's wake and I miss him dearly. I have mixed feelings about watching the programme when it's broadcast. A friend will come and sit with me to watch it. I want to see the scenes where John and I are talking to each other. Together once more.

> **'THE STAFF WERE AMAZING'**

✣ **The new series of *24 Hours in A&E* airs on C4 on Tuesday 3 January, 9pm**

'I'm the bolshie, gobby woman off the telly'

Lou Davis, 54, is the sister in charge of the A&E department. She is married to Clare, 44, an urgent care practitioner, and has a son, William, 23.

Treating a patient when you know there's TV cameras watching your every move is pretty daunting. When the television company turned up at the hospital, they installed 120 fixed cameras – they're not operated by people but they rotate around the rooms. It felt a bit sinister at first but I got used to it! I was more worried about the microphone. Could it hear me at the toilet or having a private conversation with the staff?!

I started nursing in 1986. Originally, I wanted to be a librarian because I was a quiet child, but once I went into nursing I never looked back. But the situation now is the worst it has ever been – this is not the service I want to be giving.

It's good that people get to see exactly what goes on in A&E and gain an understanding. Programmes like *Casualty* bear no relation to the reality. It's gritty. We swear a lot. I don't want viewers to think we are being nonchalant, but there is a dark humour which carries us through.

When I first started work, I'd cry every day at the terrible things that happened, and all these years later, sometimes I still do. I often think about patients who I treated years ago and I hope they realise that we did our very best to help them.

What will be the impact of the cameras for me? I'd convinced myself that I wouldn't be recognised on the street, but then friends pointed out my hair is distinctive. Some people might see me as that bolshie, gobby woman off the telly. But I'm not like that at home. I really am more like a quiet librarian!

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SOCIALISING CAN BOOST YOUR GUT HEALTH

Struggle with bloating? Certain foods upset your tummy? Spend time with your friends, says new research.* Yes, really. Scientists measured the social connectedness of monkeys and collected and analysed the DNA of their stools. Findings showed that those who socialised more had higher levels of 'good' gut bacteria. This is important for reducing the risk of certain illnesses, such as diabetes and heart disease.

It worked for me

Catherine Harrison, 52, from Hertfordshire

'I experience aching bones and rheumatism every winter. I used to dread even the simplest of tasks. I now use Well Actually Liposomal Vitamin D3 and K2 oral spray (£19.99, well-actually.co.uk). I feel energised and able to go about my daily life, without severe pain. Vitamin D helps to absorb calcium, supporting bone strength and growth.'

180 SPRAYS
W
HIGH ABSORPTION
LIPOSOMAL
VITAMIN D3 + K2
2000 IU
Lime Crush

How to...

prepare for a mammogram

Dr Deborah Lee, from Dr Fox Online Pharmacy, shares her tips...

KNOW THE RISKS

'Mammograms aren't perfect tests. There is a small risk that breast cancer could be missed, or that a non-cancerous abnormality may be detected. So keep checking yourself for changes.'

DRESS RIGHT

'Don't use deodorant, talcum powder or any creams or lotions on the breast before the examination, as these can appear as white spots on the final image. Wear a skirt or trousers so you don't need to fully undress.'

TALK TO YOUR RADIOGRAPHER

'Tell them if you have had any symptoms or any recent changes to the breast. They also need to know if you have breast implants, or if you're taking HRT.'

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9g PROTEIN
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Keep your mid-morning hunger in check with Trek's Peanut Butter Protein Flapjacks (£2 for three bars, Asda). They are packed with fibre and 9g of plant-based protein to keep you fuller for longer.

44%

OF BRITS SLEEP FOR FIVE HOURS OR LESS DUE TO STRESS ABOUT THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS**

WORDS: ROSE GOODMAN. MAIN PHOTO (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. *OXFORD UNIVERSITY. **EMMA – THE SLEEP COMPANY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. CHECK WITH YOUR GP OR MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS

WHAT WILL MAKE YOU HAPPIER?

Take our quiz to discover how you can make this year your best one yet

2023 GOALS:
1.
2.
3.

On a scale of one to 10, how happy are you today? Unfortunately, being permanently upbeat is unattainable – especially if you are dealing with health fears, family stress, employment uncertainty and money worries – but anything below seven suggests there's scope for work to be done. The good news? Adding more happiness to your life is easier than you think.

'Happiness is a state of feeling, not a trait, meaning it isn't a permanent feature, but fleeting and changeable,' says functional medicine certified health coach Suzy Glaskie. 'While some degree of our happiness is set by our genetics (experts estimate between 10% and 50%), the rest is down to us. We can learn to be happier, just as we can learn to play a musical instrument or speak a foreign language.' Here's how.

Take the quiz

Answer the questions below, then tot up your score to see whether you're mostly squares, circles, triangles or diamonds. Read on for expert advice from therapist Marisa Peer on which areas of your life need an overhaul.

1 Friends describe you as...

◆ On the go.
■ Happy-go-lucky.
● A high achiever.
▲ Generous to a fault.

2 Your role in your family is...

■ The leader – it's you who makes all the crucial decisions.
● The peacemaker – you try to keep everyone happy.
▲ The follower – you're happy to just go with the flow.
◆ The multitasker – the house wouldn't run without you.

3 You're waiting in a long queue at the supermarket checkout. You're most likely to be...

◆ Unable to stand still.
▲ Staring at the floor.
■ Thinking about ditching your shopping and leaving.
● Muttering to yourself, 'This is a nightmare!'

4 If anything, you live too much in the...

■ Present.
▲ Past.
● Future.
◆ Past and future.

5 If you had a free evening to yourself, you would...

■ Watch whatever was on TV.
● Dine at a new restaurant.
▲ Have a one-to-one with a close friend.

69

FEELING HAPPY WITH LIFE PEAKS AT THIS AGE, SAY RESEARCHERS*.

◆ Soak in a bath with a good book.

6 Your boss asks you to take on a major project at the last minute. Your first thought is…

■ I can't be bothered.
● It's so unfair.
▲ I'm really not up to the challenge.
◆ This is going to kill me.

7 When walking somewhere you're usually…

■ Dragging your feet.
● Staring at your mobile.
▲ Staring at the ground.
◆ Racing at top speed.

The results

IF YOU CHOSE MOSTLY…■

WORK ON: BEING MORE MOTIVATED

Admired for being easy-going? It might look like going with the flow, but you can feel stuck in a rut and find it hard to project yourself into the future and get excited.

TRY: THE 10% RULE.

'Motivation comes once you get going,' says Marisa. 'For example, you might not feel like cleaning the whole kitchen, but if you empty the dishwasher, you might feel like cleaning the surfaces. Tell yourself you only have to do 10% of any task. You'll be surprised how often you want to do more.'

REMEMBER: TO DO THE THING YOU HATE FIRST

'If there's something you're dreading, do it first thing in the morning,' suggests Marisa. 'Otherwise it will hang over you and sap your energy.'

IF YOU CHOSE MOSTLY…●

WORK ON: BEING MORE APPRECIATIVE

You're probably a high achiever. But being so focused on forging ahead means you forget to stop and smell the flowers.

TRY: REFRAMING YOUR PROBLEMS

'Next time you have a problem – the supermarket queues are massive, or you hate driving so far to see family, tell yourself, "My problem is someone else's dream". There's someone who'd give up everything for a trolley full of food or a loving family,' says Marisa.

REMEMBER: TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

'At the end of the day, instead of asking your partner, "How was your day?" ask them, "What was the best thing about your day?"' says Marisa. This forces you to focus on the positives.

IF YOU CHOSE MOSTLY…▲

WORK ON: BEING MORE CONFIDENT

You're kind and generous, but be careful not to give all your energy to other people. Your fear of making mistakes may be holding you back.

TRY: THE 'ONE FOR ME' RULE

'When you give someone a compliment, mentally give one to yourself,' says Marisa.

REMEMBER: TO PRACTISE FAILURE

'The only way you'll learn is to try, fail and try again,' notes Marisa. 'Practise failing in situations where it doesn't really matter. You'll normalise failure as a part of life.' Turn up a bit late to meet friends, leave your kitchen messy for a few days, or try a hobby that's out of your comfort zone so you have to work at it to improve, such as painting or learning a language.

IF YOU CHOSE MOSTLY…◆

WORK ON: BEING MORE RELAXED

Drowning in to-do lists? No one doubts your work ethic, but it means you're frazzled. You may find it hard to accept when others don't live by your standards.

TRY: TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER

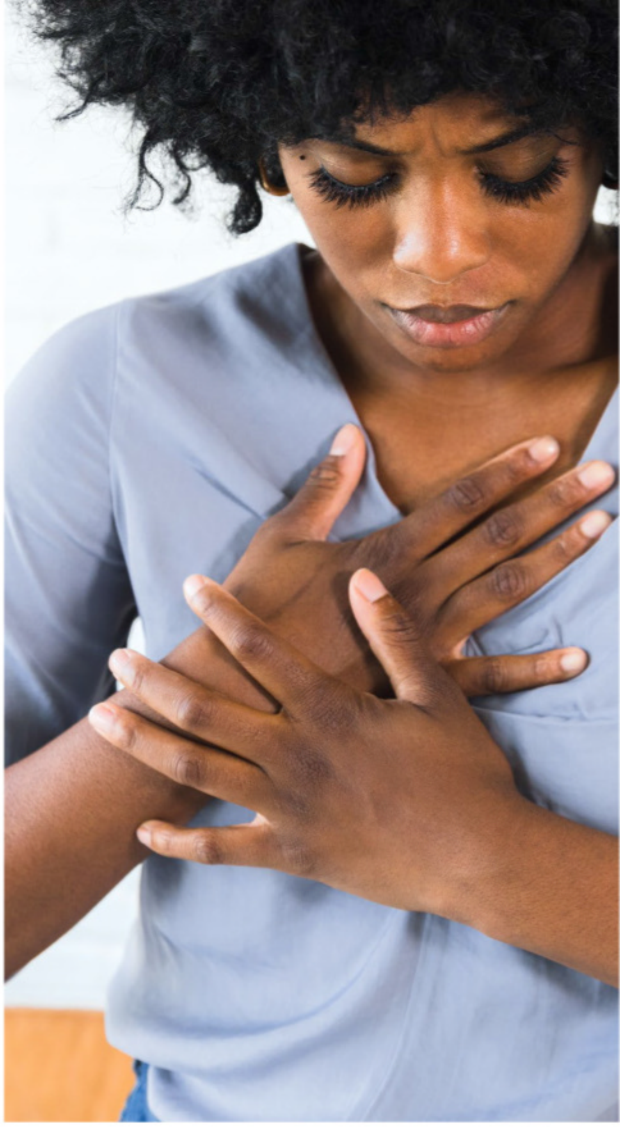
'At work, leave every aspect of your social life behind,' says Marisa. 'Similarly, at home, be 100% with your loved ones. You'll feel less stressed that way.'

REMEMBER: TO RELINQUISH CONTROL

'The only thing you can control is your own thoughts,' notes Marisa. 'Next time someone does something that upsets you, tell yourself that something must be going on in their life to make them behave in that way.'

*AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY. PHOTO: GETTY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP.

DAWN HARPER ASK THE DOCTOR



Doctor Dawn Harper answers all your questions

HE DIED RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME

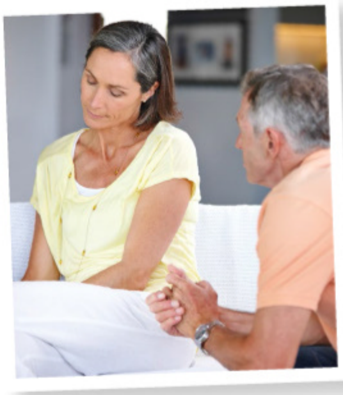
Q My husband collapsed in front of me almost a year ago now. I had done some life-support training and tried to revive him, but sadly failed. When the ambulance crew arrived, they pronounced him dead. I'm finding it very hard to process what happened and get lots of flashbacks. I constantly question what more I could have done. When can I expect this to get better?

A You have experienced an enormous trauma and what you describe is post-traumatic stress. I am sure you could benefit from some trauma counselling to help you move on from this and reclaim your life. Your GP will be able to advise on local services. You may need several sessions.

Is the lump on my chest serious?

Q A week ago, I had my fourth COVID-19 jab and felt fine, but I have since noticed a pea-sized lump on the front of my chest. It's a bit tender and pink. I know you shouldn't, but I googled side effects of the jab and it mentions a painful swelling. Should I report this to my GP?

A It is not uncommon for people to experience a tender swelling following a COVID-19 vaccination, but this is at the site of the injection, so I doubt that your lump is related to the booster. The most likely explanation is a small, infected cyst, which may require antibiotics if the redness and discomfort increase. You could email a photograph of it to your GP who will let you know if this is necessary.



WHAT CAN HELP WITH MY MOOD SWINGS?

Q I am going through the menopause and really struggling with mood swings and irritability. I know I'm being vile to my husband, but don't seem to be able to control my emotions. When I'm not shouting, I am crying. I'm sure this is the menopause but, having had breast cancer as a younger woman, I don't want to consider HRT and I don't want antidepressants as my mum was on them for years and had a horrid time coming off them. What else could I try?

A You might find St John's wort* a useful herbal remedy. A lot of my patients refer to it as 'bottled sunshine' and it has been shown to help mild to moderate depression and anxiety. As with all herbal remedies, make sure you look for a product displaying the THR logo to ensure you are using a registered product.

CONTACT DR DAWN Send your questions to drdawn@futurenet.com, follow her on Twitter @DrDawnHarper, or go to drdawn.com

*TALK TO YOUR GP BEFORE TAKING ST JOHN'S WORT AS IT MAY CLASH WITH OTHER MEDICATION

Afraid to ask?

SPIDER VEINS MAKE ME MISERABLE

Q My legs have always been one of my greater assets and, while they have kept their shape, now that I am in my 60s I am noticing some quite unsightly spider veins. I have taken to putting cover-up make-up on them when I go out, but is there anything else I can do?

A There are a variety of treatments for spider veins, including laser therapy, microwave treatment and injection of a substance that shrinks the vein. These aren't available on the NHS, so if you decide to go private, ensure that your specialist is fully qualified and registered with a professional body.

ANITA NAIK A PROBLEM SHARED

Mum-of-two Anita Naik has been an agony aunt for 31 years

Our daughters argue about our money

Q We are in our 60s and have two daughters, aged 24 and 26. We have always helped them financially, but they constantly fight about who gets more from us. Christmas was the worst this year, as my youngest commented about how much we'd spent on our grandchild (her niece, who is a year old), and my eldest snapped back that we'd paid off her loan, so she was owed it. It was so upsetting to hear. What do we do?

A Your daughters' argument about money is a common sibling rivalry fight around perceived favouritism. In reality, it's your money, and you are entitled to give what you want, especially to your grandchild. An honest talk needs to happen with your daughters about how they are behaving and how upsetting and hurtful you and your husband find it.

I HATE MY BODY

Q I hate seeing photos of myself as they remind me how awful I am. I weigh 17st and have been fat all my life. On the outside I pretend I'm OK, but inside I feel depressed to the point of wanting to hurt myself. Please help.

A Shame can lead us to do many things. It can lead us to believe that we have to be perfect. It can lead us to withdraw from loved ones, and it can lead us to be so focused on what we hate that we forget we are much more than a number on a scale. You need to seek the help of your GP and/or call the Mind infoline on 0300 123 3393. They will be able to help you unravel these painful feelings and find a way to go forward.

3 ways to...

FEEL LESS NEGATIVE ABOUT LIFE

1 **SAY MORE POSITIVE THINGS IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATION.** Saying favourable things about yourself, your work colleagues and your life in general can help positively influence your overall state of mind.

2 **SPEND LESS TIME ON SOCIAL MEDIA.** You'll feel more optimistic about things if you stop the mindless scrolls that can expose you to negativity and unhealthy comparisons to the lives of others.

3 **DOWNLOAD THE MINDSHIFT CBT APP.** This self-help anxiety-management app (free on iOS and Android) helps you focus on identifying negative thought patterns and changing them, using strategies based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

CONTACT ANITA

Send your questions to askanita@futurenet.com, follow her on Twitter @AnitaNaik, or go to anitanaik.com

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. PHOTO OF DAWN: NICKY JOHNSTON.
IF YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

THE RESOLUTIONS WE SHOULD ALL MAKE

Set yourself up for success by committing to small and achievable changes this year

You won't be surprised to hear that last year, the most common resolutions in the UK were to lose weight (39% of those surveyed*), eat healthier (38%) and get fitter (36%). But while we may have had the best intentions on New Year's Day, many of us won't have made it further than the second Friday in January, also known as Quitter's Day, for this very reason.

If you've been guilty of this in the past, try making one or more of our specific, realistic promises, instead of trying to revamp your whole life. These bite-sized resolutions all come recommended by our experts and, while they require minimal effort and upheaval, they could make a big difference.

STICK AT IT

On average, it takes 66 days (just over two months) to form a new habit, according to research**. To be accountable, share your goal. 'Going it alone may prevent you from achieving success. Get someone to check in on your progress,' says motivational life coach Carole Ann Rice.

SMELL YOUR FLOSS AFTER USE

'I tell people to smell their floss after using it, because it usually smells gross – that's the scent of bacteria having a party where your brush can't reach. It encourages people to keep using it,' says dentist James Goolnik, founder of the Bow Lane Dental Group. You should use floss or interdental brushes as part of your daily dental routine. 'Plus, you need to brush for two minutes, twice a day. Most people brush for 30 seconds – but that's not enough,' adds James.

EAT SOME FAT

'I don't advocate a low-fat diet,' says dermatologist Dr Stefanie Williams, founder of European Dermatology London. 'You should eat plenty of good fat, such as coconut oil, avocado, olive oil and nuts to slow down the skin's wrinkling process. Do avoid vegetable oils, though, as they are high in omega-6 fats, which can have an inflammatory effect on the body.'

Listen to music more

'The ears lead to the brain, making music a wellness supertool,' says neuroscientist Dr Julia Jones, author of *F-Bomb: Longevity Made Easy* (£12.99, This Day in Music Books). 'Listening to music is a quick and easy way to trigger the release of brain chemicals, influence brainwaves and change our mood and energy on demand.' If you want to go a step further and have access to a guitar or piano, play it.

'LEARNING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IS A HIGHLY EFFICIENT WAY OF BUILDING NEW BRAIN CONNECTIONS,' ADDS DR JONES

Wear sunglasses even in winter

'You should be as cautious with your eyes around sunlight as you are with your skin,' says optometrist Rakesh Kapoor from Specsavers. But while your skin is largely covered on a bright winter's day, your eyes remain vulnerable. 'Protecting against UV light helps reduce the risk of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, which can lead to blindness,' says Rakesh.

LIMIT LATE-NIGHT SCROLLING

Fed up of lying awake into the early hours? Stress and digital devices may be to blame. 'Put your phone away an hour before bed,' says sleep scientist Dr Sophie Bostock. 'Many people use social media to find reassurance in their community, thinking this assurance will relax them, when it could be making them even more anxious.'

GET A DAILY NATURE FIX

'Spend at least 20 minutes out of your day in nature,' says psychologist Dr Meg Arroll. 'Go for a walk in the park or even your garden. Ecotherapy – contact with nature – improves mood and emotional wellbeing, boosts vitality, and helps reduce depression and anxiety.' Plus, people who live in areas with more birds and trees are less likely to be stressed, according to a University of Exeter study.

Engage your pelvic floor

It's a good idea to work some strengthening exercises, or kegels, into your day to help prevent potential problems, especially if you're approaching menopause. 'Try tightening the pelvic floor (as if you're holding in a wee and gas at the same time) and drawing in the lower abdominal muscles before you get up from a chair, lift something from the floor, balance on one leg or go up the stairs,' says chief physical therapist Amy Hoover at P.volve.

BEND YOUR KNEES

When you pick something up, don't forget to use your knees. 'Bending forward to pick up bags from the car boot tends to localise stress and strain the lower back,' says physiotherapist Rory Brown. Instead, bend your knees, get your leg muscles in gear and keep back pain at bay.

Go with the flow

'My one "rule" would be to have fewer rules!' says psychologist Dr Mark Winwood, at AXA PPP Healthcare. 'A lot of stress is created by ourselves, as we try to conform to rigid beliefs or ideas about what we should do or how we should do it. If we were all just a little bit more flexible in our thinking – if we stopped trying to be so perfect – we'd create a lot less stress in our own lives.'

PHOTOS: GETTY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. *SURVEY BY GO.COMPARE.COM. **EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

BEAUTY on a

SANCTUARY SPA
200ml 6.7 fl oz US

Speedy moisturiser

There's nothing worse than waiting in the cold for your body cream to sink in. **Sanctuary Spa Ultra Rich Wet Skin Miracle Moisturiser, £8.50, Sainsbury's**, is the ultimate solution – apply to wet skin in the shower and, by the time you get dressed, it will have sunk in.

MINERAL WELLBEING
Westlab
MINDFUL
100% NATURAL Bath Salts
FRANKINCENSE BERGAMOT & CBD
EPSOM & HIMALAYAN MINERAL SALTS
1Kg 2.2lb

Savvy salts

Epsom salts have an endless list of benefits and they're inexpensive too. **Westlab Mindful Bath Salts, £7.99, Holland & Barrett**, is a huge 1kg bag blended with bergamot and CBD.

NEW
L'ORÉAL PARIS
ELVIVE
Dream lengths
REPAIRS FOR HAIR THAT FEELS LIKE NEW*
LONG, DAMAGED HAIR
SAVIOUR MASK

Hair healer

Want to stretch out time before your next hair appointment? **L'Oréal Elvive Dream Lengths Saviour Mask, £6.99, Sainsbury's**, will overhaul unhappy hair in minutes, leaving it shiny and swishy.

Boots
Glow
Banana Peel and Polish
Exfoliates the skin for a healthy glow
100 ml 3.3 Fl. Oz.

Brighten up

Skin looking lacklustre? **Boots Glow Banana Peel and Polish, £4**, uses exfoliating acids to buff away dead skin cells and leave your complexion looking radiant. Use every three-four days.

GARNIER
Body SUPERFOOD
48h HYDRATING GEL-CREAM
HYDRATE SKIN UP TO 10 LAYERS DEEP
Normal Skin
Fast-absorption
WATERMELON + HYALURONIC ACID
NATURAL 96% ORIGIN
VEGAN
380ml

Hydration station

The key to keeping your body soft and flake-free is to make moisturising a daily habit. **Garnier Body Superfood 48h Hydrating Gel-Cream, £8.99, Wilko**, sinks in quickly and doesn't feel like a chore to use.

BAYLIS & HARDING
GOODNESS.
beautifully clean
NATURAL BATH SOAK
BAIN MOUSSANT NATUREL
ROSE & GERANIUM
WITH ORGANIC EXTRACTS OF LAVENDER & ROSEMARY
Vegan
NET 500mL 16.9 FL.OZ. US.

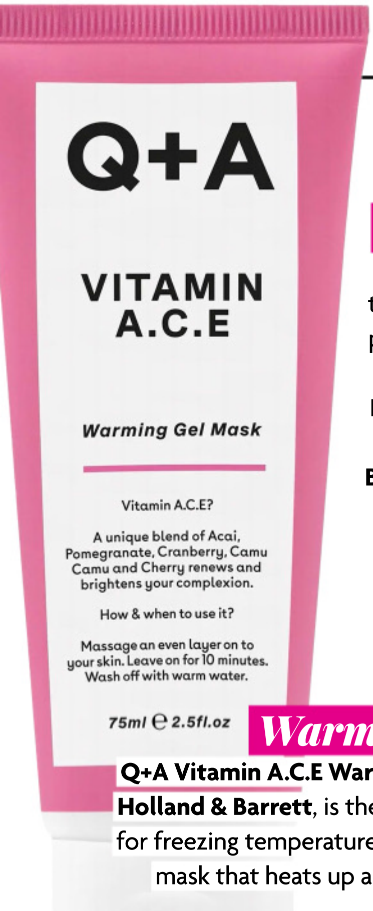
Soaking suds

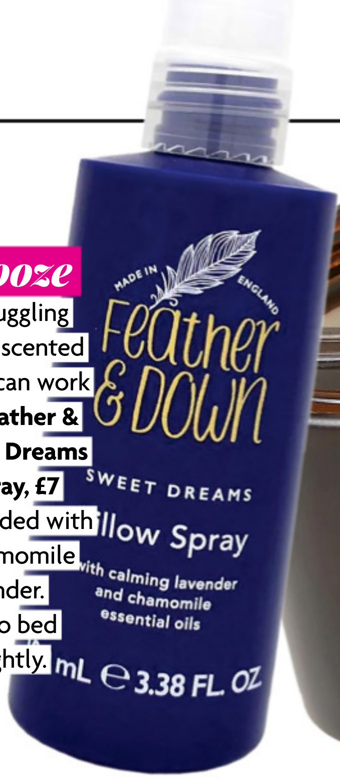
Baylis & Harding Goodness Rose & Geranium Natural Bath Soak, £4, Ocado, smells like heaven. It's the perfect accompaniment to your evening bath – just add a couple of candles to up the fancy factor.

WORDS: RHIANNON DERBYSHIRE

£10 AND UNDER budget

Create an at-home spa with these pampering picks for skin, hair and body


Q+A
VITAMIN A.C.E
Warming Gel Mask
75ml ℮ 2.5fl.oz


Feather & Down
SWEET DREAMS
Pillow Spray

Hit snooze

If you're struggling to drift off, a scented pillow spray can work wonders. **Feather & Down Sweet Dreams Pillow Spray, £7 Boots**, is blended with calming chamomile and lavender. Spritz onto bed sheets nightly.

CALM
apothecary
SCENTED CANDLE

Brilliant balm

There's nothing worse than dry, chapped lips and **Lanolips 101 Ointment Multi-Balm in Peach, £8.99, lookfantastic.com**, is one of the best balms we've tried. It can also be used on other dry patches on the face and body, like cuticles, elbows and hands.

Lanolips
101 OINTMENT
MULTI-BALM PEACH

Warm up

Q+A Vitamin A.C.E Warming Gel Mask, £9, Holland & Barrett, is the ultimate skin treat for freezing temperatures. It's a rejuvenating mask that heats up as it hits the skin.

Fancy flame

You don't have to spend a fortune on scented candles – the Apothecary range from M&S looks and feels like a luxury brand, but is purse-friendly. Try **Apothecary Calm Scented Candle, £8, M&S**.

Easy on the eyes

When we're feeling stressed, we always turn to **Spacemasks Self-Heating Eye Mask, £3.85, sephora.co.uk**. It's a self-warming mask that will instantly calm a busy mind.

SOAP & GLORY
PERFECT ZEN
Foaming
BATH & SHOWER Oil

Softening body scrub

There's nothing more satisfying than a good, gritty body scrub. We love using **Revolution Vitamin C Glow Body Scrub, £8, Boots** – it contains uplifting grapefruit and mandarin, and skin will feel silky-smooth in seconds.

REVOLUTION
VITAMIN C GLOW
BODY SCRUB

Spa-scaped shower

If baths aren't your thing, make a shower extra relaxing with **Soap & Glory Perfect Zen Foaming Bath & Shower Oil, £8.95, Boots**. It leaves limbs super-soft and is scented with lavender.

PS...
SMOOTHING
POLYGLUTAMIC ACID + NIACINAMIDE SHEET MASK

Masked marvel

Sheet masks are a great way of injecting skin with an extra level of hydration. **PS... Smoothing Polyglutamic + Niacinamide Sheet Mask, 80p, Primark**, is a brilliant bargain, infused with amino acids and niacinamide.

Menopausal SKIN FIXES

Understand your skin with our expert tips, best buys and techniques to survive – and thrive – during the menopause

Has your skin suddenly lost the plot? Dryness, itching, sensitivity and acne are all symptoms of the menopause. There are around 15.5 million women in the UK who are currently either peri- or postmenopausal, but research by No7 found that 56% of women didn't recognise the menopause was the cause of their skin changes. In fact there are over 10 symptoms of the menopause that directly impact the skin. 'During this time, it's important to focus on self-care to learn about your own skin and understand its texture, tone and needs,' says Dr Alia Ahmed, consultant dermatologist. 'I always tell clients that their skincare will change all year round, and this is the same for the seasons of life.' So if you suddenly find your moisturiser isn't making a dent in quenching your skin, it's probably a sign you need to switch up your skincare.

Sort your spots

Are you suddenly breaking out? During the menopause, skin goes through similar hormonal fluctuations to puberty, meaning that many women get spots around the mouth, chin and jawline. Home in on your spots with **Super Facialist Clear Skin On The Spot Clarifying Gel, £5.90, justmylook.com.** Used as a primer or daily mask, **Menopause Faace Mask, £31, wearefaace.com,** contains zinc to fight breakouts without drying your skin.

SUPER FACIALIST
clearskin
10% niacinamide
on the spot clarifying gel
soin anti-imperfection
5ml e 0.5 fl oz
mask
MENO PAUSE
_faace
100ml e 3.4 fl.oz

Plump out wrinkles

During the first five years of menopause, skin loses around 30% of its collagen, the bouncy cushion of the skin. Skin becomes less elastic, and you may notice deeper fine lines and wrinkles. 'Retinoids and peptides stimulate collagen production and improve skin cell-turnover and elasticity,' explains Dr Ahmed. First up, PS Retinol Booster Serum, £3.50, Primark, will soften wrinkles and revitalise skin. The Ordinary Multi-Peptide + HA Serum, £14.30, Boots, is another great serum using peptides to send messages to skin cells to produce more collagen to firm everything up.

PS...
Retinol
booster serum
SÉRUM REVITALISANT AU RETINOL
0.5% Retinol Complex
Clinical Formulations with Integrity.
Formulations Cliniques Empreintes d'Intégrité.
The Ordinary.
Multi-Peptide • HA Serum
Sérum Multi-Peptides • HA

REVOLUTION
SKINCARE LONDON
CERAMIDES
HYDRATING CLEANSER
5
CERAMID

facefacts.
CERAMIDE
SKIN BARRIER COMPLEX
Repairing
Serum Cream
CERAMIDES + HYALURONIC ACID + OATS
Fragrance Free
VEGAN

Build your barrier

The backbone of healthy skin is the moisture barrier that keeps hydration locked in. Low oestrogen has a direct effect on this barrier, causing dryness and sensitivity. Ceramides are fatty acids that help to seal up weak spots in the moisture barrier, like Polyfilla. Wash with a ceramide cleanser like **Revolution Skincare Ceramides Hydrating Cleanser, £9, revolutionbeauty.com.** 'Gently pat dry your skin after cleansing and avoid aggressive rubbing,' says Dr Ahmed. Follow with **Face Facts Ceramide Repairing Serum Cream, £2.99, Home Bargains,** which helps ease the tight feeling of dry skin.

VICHY
LABORATOIRES
NEOVADIOL
REVITALIZING NIGHT CREAM
CRÈME NUIT REVITALISANTE
No7
Menopause Skincare
Instant Cooling Mist
PROVEN RESULTS
Skin feels cooled and hydrated
CO-CREATED with MENOPAUSAL WOMEN

Drench dry skin

Declining oestrogen has a knock-on effect on the production of hyaluronic acid, the moisturising molecule that helps skin stay plump and dewy, so you're more likely to see rough skin that has lost its glow and feels more sensitive. **Weleda Skin Food, £13.49, Superdrug,** makes dry skin feel silky and quenched. Then at night, choose creams with hyaluronic acid to counteract the overnight moisture loss caused by night sweats. As a skincare ingredient, hyaluronic acid can hold up to 1,000 times its weight in water, great news for extremely dry skin. **Boots Ingredients Hyaluronic Acid Sleep Mask, £5, Boots,** is our hydration hero.

WELEDA
Since 1921
Skin Food
Rich, intensive skin care
For Face or Body
For very dry and rough skin
ORGANIC
Certified Natural Skin Care
30 ml ℮
Boots
INGREDIENTS
HYALURONIC ACID
SLEEP MASK
30 ml ℮ 1 Fl. Oz

Cool down

Having a hot moment? More than 80% of women experience hot flushes during the menopause. Keep No7 Menopause Skincare Instant Cooling Mist, £14.95, Boots, handy to refresh hot, flushed skin. Before bed, apply Vichy Neovadiol Perimenopause Revitalizing Night Cream, £34, Boots. It cools the skin down by up to 2.7 degrees to comfort and soothe during the night.

WORDS: STEPHANIE MAYLOR. PHOTO: GETTY

DOWNLOAD YOUR *FREE* DIGITAL COPY TODAY

Want to enjoy all your favourite foods while on the keto diet? Then this book can help you do just that. Inside you'll find 49 delicious recipes, including carb-free favourites like mac and cheese and showstopping keto desserts.

To get your free copy of *Keto Comfort Food* use the following link: bit.ly/womansown385

Offer available from 3 January to 3 February 2023

WORTH £9.99*
YOUR FAVOURITE FOODS
NEW
KETO-FRIENDLY COOKING
KETO COMFORT FOOD
DELICIOUS DESSERTS
FILLING BREAKFASTS
PIPING HOT AND HEARTY DINNERS
49 LOW-CARB RECIPES
Digital Edition
FOREWORD BY ANDREW JUSTICE PROFESSIONAL KETO CHEF
STEWS • CURRIES • COOKIES • PIES • KEBABS • CAKES & MORE

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23 PAGE DIET SPECIAL

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How to dress yourself slim

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Five light and easy recipes

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Look good as you get fit

NEW YEAR *shape-up!*

What's inside

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42 Lose 7lb in seven days, and kick off the new year slimmer and healthier than ever

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50 Celebrities share their fitness secrets to looking fabulous in their 50s

52 It took years before Gail Cuffe chose to lose weight – and she's never looked back

54 Our fashion experts give their tips for a wardrobe to give your confidence a boost

56 Discover five delicious meals, all coming in under 350 calories each

50
Fitness secrets from the famous

52
Weight-loss diary

PHOTOS: GETTY

ACTIVE SPECIAL

Chic FOR YOUR SHAPE

Look fab as you get fit

£12.50
Long-sleeve tee, sizes 6-22, F&F Clothing

Tummy-flattering top

Layering is key, particularly if you're exercising outdoors. The crossover hem on this lightweight top creates a loose drape to boost your confidence as you lunge your way to a strong body.

Shorts

Why not swap your leggings for a pair of cool cycling shorts? High-waisted styles will shape, enhance and support your curves, and they come in a variety of colours so you can coordinate with the rest of your outfit. These Contur shorts also have a super-stretch fabric that offers the perfect muscular compression to aid recovery power.

£9.99
Cycling shorts, sizes xs-xl, H&M

£39.99
Cycling shorts, sizes xs-xl, conturuk.com

Supportive swimwear

Not only does this sporty swimsuit have an attractive and slimming illusion print, but it also features a hidden bust shelf liner for support, adjustable straps and a shaping tummy-control panel, meaning you'll feel and look your best when you hit the water.

£54
CrystalLux swimsuit, sizes 6-18, speedo.com

£29.99
Jacket, sizes xs-xl

£9.99
Bra, sizes xs-xl

£29.99
Leggings, sizes xs-xl

£34.99
Trainers, all H&M

£19.99
Hoodie, sizes xs-xxxl, H&M

£35
Hoodie, sizes xs-xxl, Next

Hoodie

Keep warm after your workout with a stylish hoodie. If you want extra coverage over your hips and bottom, try this longline style from Next, with its flattering extended hem and side-panel detail.

COMPILED BY: ANTONIA KRASKOWSKI

£15
Sweatshirt
£15
Leggings
£18
Trainers, all
George at Asda

£42
Sports bra, sizes 28DD-40J, Panache at John Lewis & Partners

£5.99
Running bra, sizes s-xl, Decathlon

£44
Bra, sizes 32B-42D, Triumph

Sports bras

A good sports bra is a must. Panache's award-winning design features individual moulded seam-free cups for maximum comfort and support, plus wide straps that can be worn two ways – straight or racer back. Meanwhile, Triumph's Triaction technology is designed to fit the contours of your body and its lightweight, unpadded styles are all breathable and sweat-wicking.

£5
Leggings, sizes xxs-xl, Primark

£43
Leggings, sizes xxs-xl, Reebok

£39.50
Leggings, sizes 6-24, Goodmove at M&S

Leggings

If you're literally hitting the ground running this January, make sure you invest in great leggings. This M&S Goodmove design has a supportive high waist, a rear pocket for essentials, and a reflective pattern ideal for after-dark runs.

If you're petite, it can be hard to find leggings that don't pool around your ankles, but Reebok's Lux styles are also available in a petite length, still featuring a sculpting high-rise waistband.

Trainers

Don't forget to treat yourself to a new pair of trainers! Nike's Legend Essentials are great all-rounders that have a flat heel and flexible sole, meaning they'll provide vital support and comfort to your feet whether you're spinning around at a Zumba class or lifting weights at the gym.

£54.95
Trainers, Nike

THE POWER OF

When Gill and Elaine decided to lose weight, they didn't have to do it alone

'I was losing weight for myself, but wanted to make her proud too'

When Elaine Farrell, 63, needed to lose weight for her health, her daughter Suzie, 41, decided to get in on the action.

Gasping in pain, all I'd done was walk upstairs. It was November 2018, and I was suffering from fibromyalgia, asthma, and COPD – chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Taking piles of pills daily, my weight only worsened my symptoms. I'd always been big, but at a size 28, I could barely pick up my grandchildren for a cuddle.

Prescribed steroids for my lung conditions, my weight climbed higher. 'I can't lose weight while taking these,' I explained to my doctor, frustrated. He decided to wean me off, but by December 2018 my health worsened. A combination of stopping the steroids and my size had made me ill, and all my limbs swelled.

'WEIGHT WAS FALLING OFF'

'I'm worried you're going to die,' my daughter Tracy, then 39, sobbed. I knew something had to change.

I'd tried Slimming World before, but decided to try a different group closer to my other daughter Suzie's home 20 minutes away. Pregnant with her third child, it was a lovely chance to pop in for a chat after meetings.

SHARING THE LOSS

Before I knew it, weight was falling off. I enjoyed cooking Slimming-World approved meals, and sharing each pound lost with the group. Every time I stepped through Suzie's door, she'd gasp.

'You look brilliant!' she beamed, 'I want to come too.' Suzie had struggled to drop the weight from her previous pregnancies and was self-conscious. I knew losing a bit would do her good.

Six weeks after giving birth to her son Joe, Suzie joined me at Slimming World. I shared my recipes and we'd send each other photos of meals to keep ourselves accountable. If we had an indulgent meal out, we'd cut down the next day. I was losing weight for myself, but wanted to make her proud, too.

After just over a year, I reached my target of losing 8st. Suzie looked and felt different too, dropping from a size 18 to a 10. But best of all, she'd got her confidence back.

Chasing my grandchildren around the park, a smile spread across my face – it was something I didn't think I'd be able to do. Now, my medication has halved too, and I haven't had to go back on steroids. And even though we reached our goals, Suzie and I are still cheering each other on.

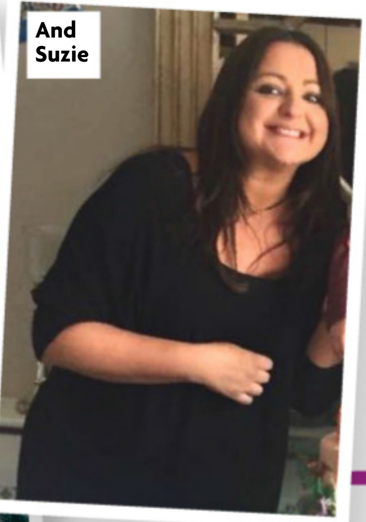
Happier and healthier

ELAINE
BEFORE: 21ST 7.5LB
AFTER: 13ST 6LB
SUZIE
BEFORE: 15ST 6LB
AFTER: 11ST 6LB
TOTAL WEIGHT LOST: 12ST 0.5LB

'Back to my old self'

Suzie, 41, says, 'Watching my mum's weight-loss journey was inspirational. If she could do it with all her health problems, why couldn't I do the same? Going to Slimming World together meant we could encourage each other. Now, watching my mum play with my kids, I've never seen her so happy and healthy. My friends have noticed big changes in me too, saying I'm back to my old self, which feels amazing. I couldn't be happier with what me and Mum have achieved together.'

Elaine before



And Suzie

TWO

'Our relationship is twice as strong'

Gill Thomas, 59, lives in Greater Manchester with her husband Julian, 62.

Opening a packet of chocolate biscuits, I couldn't stop myself reaching for another – and another. It was April 2020, and with the country in lockdown, my comfort eating was out of control.

My food addiction began when I was a teenager and by the time I met Julian in 1979, when I was 16, I had no confidence in myself. Yet, Julian never made me feel insecure – he loved me just the way I was. We had two daughters, Megan and Katrina, in our 20s, and with each pregnancy I piled on more weight.

As the kids grew up I wanted to slim down, but no matter what I tried, I'd always slip back into old habits. I was active – walking and swimming regularly, and I'd quit smoking in my 30s – but loading up on more than 3,000 calories per day, I was kidding myself.

And now, in the midst of lockdown, all I could do was eat. But by autumn 2020, Julian was suffering with leg numbness, and scans soon revealed he needed risky spinal surgery that could leave him paralysed.

Meanwhile, I was tipping the scales at 23st at 5ft4in. Constantly out of breath, I could only climb the stairs on all fours. 'I can barely look after myself, how can I care for you if anything happens?' I said to Julian, worried.

I considered weight-loss surgery and injections, but thought it was too risky. A friend suggested LighterLife. It involved a combination of eating only their low-cal products, alongside counselling. It promised weight loss of around a stone each month, and with 10st to lose, I wanted fast results. For the first four days, my stomach wouldn't stop rumbling – going from 3,000 calories per day to toddler-sized portions was tough. But I stayed strong – watching Julian tuck into a roast lamb dinner, I ate my low-cal products with no fuss. And after three weeks, I'd already lost a stone.

'I WANTED FAST RESULTS'

WORDS: VERONIQUE HAWKSWORTH

More fashion conscious

10st heavier

Carrying 5st more

GIVE IT A GO

Julian was impressed. 'I need to give this a go,' he said. At 16st 7lb, he wasn't as big as me, but still struggled with his weight. So he signed up, and we got rid of all the regular food in our house. Cheering each other on, we supported each other in the tougher moments, too.

By Christmas 2021, I'd lost 8st, and Julian was well on his way to losing five. After a year, we started reintroducing normal foods back into our diets.

Now, I've lost 10st, and fit into a size 14. I'm more outgoing and courageous, and feel comfy in whatever clothes I throw on. Julian feels amazing too, having maintained his loss of 5st. Never interested in fashion before, he now loves going shopping with Katrina. We may be half the people we used to be, but our relationship is twice as strong!

GILL
BEFORE: 23ST 2LB
AFTER: 12ST 7LB
JULIAN
BEFORE: 16ST 7LB
AFTER: 11ST 11LB
TOTAL WEIGHT LOST: 15ST 5LB

'Looking forward'

Julian, 62, says, 'Losing weight alongside Gill meant we were there to support each other, taking photos of each other's progress and scribbling down our weight loss on a whiteboard. It became a bit of a competition! Walking was difficult after my spine operation, but losing weight made recovery easier. Now, we're looking forward to an active retirement together. I'm so proud of us both.'

START THE NEW YEAR SLIM

LOSE 7lb IN 7 DAYS

Shed weight, eat three good meals a day, and trick your body lighter and leaner for 2023

Overindulged over Christmas and New Year? Your clothes may be feeling uncomfortably tight. But the good news is it's easier (and quicker!) to lose those extra pounds than you think. That's because US nutritionist Haylie Pomroy, author of *The Fast Metabolism Diet* (£10.99, Vermilion), has developed a diet to help your metabolism burn fat. On her easy-to-follow plan you can expect to lose 7lb in just seven days, shed cellulite and build muscle, with no calorie counting. The plan works by using food to rev up a sluggish metabolism. You eat three satisfying meals and two snacks a day, but still lose weight.

And, for those with more to lose – or who want to kick-start the year with a healthier month – you can carry on the plan for another three weeks and lose up to 20lb in 28 days. With A-list clients including Jennifer Lopez and Reese Witherspoon, Haylie definitely knows how to get results.

YOUR 3-STAGE DIET

Working through the eating plan in the following phases will kick-start your metabolism.

1 Unwind

DAYS 1-2: This phase is designed to lower stress and calm the adrenal glands. You'll eat three comforting, carb-rich, moderate-protein, low-fat meals, plus two fruit snacks.

PHASE 1 FOODS

- **Carb-rich foods:** brown or wild rice, quinoa and oats.
- **Foods high in natural sugars:** apples, pineapples and strawberries. These help your blood sugar stay stable and your adrenals metabolise fat efficiently.
- **Vitamin B- and C-rich foods:** lean beef, turkey, lentils, tomatoes, broccoli – to stimulate metabolism and convert glucose into energy.

2 Unlock fat stores

DAYS 3-4: This phase helps your metabolism lay down muscle and burn more fat. There'll be no fruit or grains in this phase. You'll eat three high-protein, low-carb, low-fat meals, with the addition of two protein snacks.

PHASE 2 FOODS

- **Foods that support liver function (these, in turn, help your cells to release fat):** leafy greens, garlic and onions.
- **High-protein foods to help build muscle:** lean beef, pork and chicken and low-fat fish, such as cod.
- Vegetables such as kale, lettuce, watercress and rocket.

3 Unleash the burn

DAYS 5-7: This phase is high in healthy fats, with low-glycaemic fruits. 'Ironically, eating fat after not eating it for a few days makes you start burning fat like crazy,' says Haylie. You'll eat three moderate-carb and protein meals, plus two healthy-fat snacks.

PHASE 3 FOODS

- Healthy fats, such as nuts and avocados.
- **Lower-glycaemic fruit and veg:** blackberries, raspberries, grapefruit, kiwis, cauliflower, asparagus, spinach and sweet potatoes.
- **Thyroid-stimulating foods:** prawns and coconut oil.

Your diet plan rules

DO

- **Eat every three to four hours. This helps to prevent your blood-sugar levels dropping, which is when hunger and cravings kick in.**
- **Have breakfast within 30 mins of waking up every day.**
- **Follow the phases in order.**
- **Drink plenty of water. Aim for 8-10 glasses a day and try flavouring it with fresh mint, cucumber slices or fresh fruit, if needed.**
- **Exercise three days week. We recommend brisk walking, slow swimming or badminton – anything that slightly raises your heart rate and breathing. For more inspiration, turn to p46.**

DON'T

- **Skip meals or snacks.**
- **Eat foods that aren't allowed in your phase.**
- **Go off the menu.**
- **Eat the following, which aren't allowed on this plan: wheat, corn, dairy, soy, refined sugars, alcohol, dried fruit and fruit juices, artificial sweeteners, 'fat-free' diet foods. If you're struggling to ditch alcohol, signing up to the Dry January challenge at alcoholchange.org.uk can help keep you on track.**

Get the best results

Determined for this to work? These tips will help you stay on track.

PLAN AHEAD

Buy the ingredients you need in advance, so you can complete the week without stopping. When you're at the supermarket, make sure you have a list to follow. This way, you won't be as tempted to steer your trolley down the naughtier aisles!

EAT SLOWLY

The digestion process starts in your mouth, so help it along by chewing your food properly before swallowing. The aim is to chew until the mouthful has lost texture. This will take longer for tougher foods like nuts and beef than for softer food like mashed potatoes.

USE DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

If you're having a craving for a particular food that's off limits, try to distract yourself with a task (or take a walk or make a phone call to a friend). Like a wave, cravings tend to rise to a peak before ebbing away.

CUT BACK ON SALT

Try flavouring your food with healthier herbs, spices, citrus zest and juices, garlic, ginger, chillies and flavoured vinegars.

AVOID COFFEE OR TEA

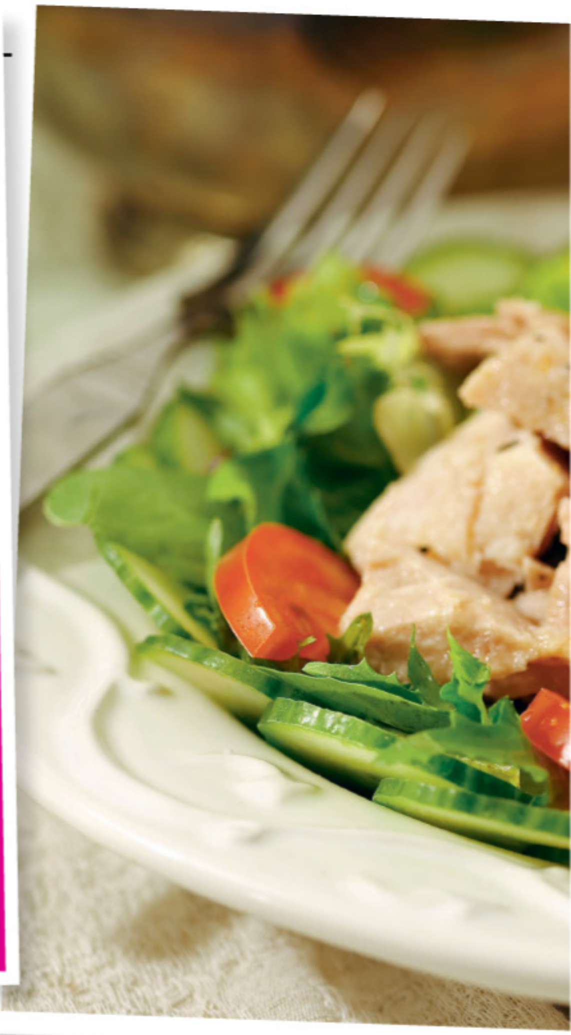
Have herbal or fruit teas instead.

RETHINK YOUR SOCIAL PLANS

This plan won't work if your week is packed with drinking and eating out. Once the wine is open, your good intentions will collapse.

JOIN FORCES

Taking the challenge on with a friend means that you can support each other and swap tips – you'll be far more likely to succeed.



DAY 1

- **Breakfast** Porridge oats with berries.
- **Snack** 150g pineapple.
- **Lunch** Put chicken breast, stock, garlic, mushrooms, tomatoes and oregano in a slow cooker. Cook for four hours on high. Serve with wild rice.
- **Snack** An orange.
- **Dinner** Turkey chilli – minced turkey, mixed beans, lentils and courgettes.

DAY 2

- **Breakfast** Pulse oats in a blender, add water, frozen strawberries, ice cubes and cinnamon. Blend until smooth.
- **Snack** An apple.
- **Lunch** Open chicken sandwich on wheat-free bread with mustard, lettuce, tomato and red onion.
- **Snack** A pear.
- **Dinner** Brown rice fusilli pasta served with chicken sausage, courgette, broccoli, red onion and crushed garlic.

DAY 3

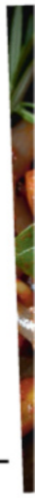
- **Breakfast** Mushroom and spinach omelette (made with egg whites).
- **Snack** Spread horseradish on beef slices and wrap around cucumber spears.
- **Lunch** Beef and kale soup – cook stewing beef, stock, kale, spinach, mushrooms, leek, celery, spring onions, red onions and garlic in a slow cooker.
- **Snack** Three hard-boiled egg whites.
- **Dinner** Grilled halibut served with steamed broccoli.

DAY 4

- **Breakfast** Spanish egg-white scramble – add onions, shallots, spinach and chillies to egg white in a pan.
- **Snack** Smoked salmon with cucumber.
- **Lunch** Tuna and cucumber salad.
- **Snack** Two slices of chicken.
- **Dinner** Baked cinnamon-mustard chicken – rub a mix of ground cinnamon and dry mustard on a skinless chicken breast. Bake, then serve with spinach.

DAY 5

- **Breakfast** 1 slice wheat-free toast (such as rye) with ½ avocado, tomato and cucumber slices.
- **Snack** 55g prawns with a lemon wedge to squeeze over for flavouring.
- **Lunch** Olive and tomato salad with chicken or turkey slices.
- **Snack** Red sweet pepper strips dipped in salad dressing.
- **Dinner** Chicken stir-fry with toasted sesame oil, cabbage, onion, courgette and broccoli, served with rice or quinoa.



DAY 6

- **Breakfast** 1 slice of wheat-free toast with nut butter and berries.
- **Snack** Celery sticks dipped in salad dressing.
- **Lunch** 3-egg salad (2 with yolks removed), including tomatoes, olives, red onion and mixed leafy greens.
- **Snack** 55g raw almonds.
- **Dinner** Coconut chicken curry served with quinoa.

QUICK FLATTER TUM TRICK

Try some gentle tummy massage. Use circular motions from right to left for about five minutes. If you like, you can use a massage oil to help. The massage motion helps to soothe your digestive system, release any trapped gas and maintain digestive regularity for a flatter tummy.

DAY 7

- **Breakfast** Berry nutty oat smoothie – pulse oats in a blender until powdery, add sunflower seeds then blend some more. Add water, frozen fruit and some ice cubes, then blend again.
- **Snack** ½ avocado.
- **Lunch** Endive and tuna salad.
- **Snack** Celery sticks dipped in hummus.
- **Dinner** Pork loin roast with rosemary, served with sweet potato.

Lose weight, get healthy

Is the festive excess mainly showing around your waist? Tummy fat raises your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. The NHS recommends slimming down if your waist measures 80cm or more – you're at high risk if your waist measures over 88cm.

Busting those metabolism myths!

Haylie's plan is effective as it will kick-start your metabolism. But that 'M' word is thrown around a lot these days. Think you know how it all works? Think again...

MYTH: OUR METABOLISM GETS SLOWER AS WE AGE

It used to be thought that metabolism slowed down from around the age of 30, but a study showed that this may not be the case. We may continue to use energy at a similar rate until we are 60*. That said, it's true that if your activity levels have gradually decreased as you've got older, or you've lost muscle mass, your met rate could have stalled. 'There may be age-related trends, but in most cases, metabolic rate is linked to changes in habits and lifestyle,' says Mohit Kumar, co-founder of metabolic fitness platform ultrahuman.com.

MYTH: EXERCISE AFFECTS METABOLISM DIFFERENTLY DURING THE DAY

False! 'It doesn't matter what time of day you exercise, the benefits are the same,' says sports dietitian Alex Cook. So exercise when it suits you, rather than when you think it will have the most impact.

MYTH: COFFEE AND GREEN TEA NATURALLY INCREASE YOUR METABOLIC RATE

No, sadly not. 'If they did, doubtless we'd all be super-slim without having to make much effort,' says Alex. 'The evidence for these drinks having any real impact on our metabolism is flimsy, at best.'

*SCIENCE JOURNAL. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

13 WAYS TO BURN 400 CALORIES

Get back on track with these simple ways to blast fat

Can't find the motivation to exercise? You're not the only one – especially when it's cold outside. In fact, 40% of Brits say they struggle due to lower energy levels throughout the winter months.* But you don't need an extreme regime. Whether you have 30 minutes or two hours, fancy an online class, prefer the outdoors or just like moving at home, we reveal the best fat-burning activities to kick-start your weight loss.

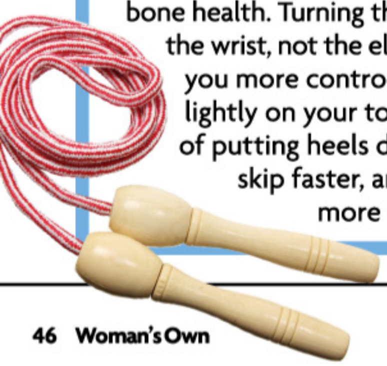
Got 30 minutes? Try...

1 JOGGING

This cardiovascular workout has a positive effect on blood pressure and cholesterol, and can reduce anxiety, too. Alternate between walking and jogging – the NHS Couch to 5K app will help to track your progress (Free, App Store and Google Play). Prone to knee pain? Choose grass over pavement, and make sure you're wearing a quality pair of trainers to reduce impact.

2 SKIPPING

Not just for the playground, a skipping session works the whole body. You'll get fitter, sculpt your shoulders, arms and legs and boost bone health. Turning the rope from the wrist, not the elbow, will give you more control. Try to land lightly on your toes, instead of putting heels down – you'll skip faster, and burn more calories.



Jogging can reduce anxiety

MIX IT UP

For good physical and mental health, the NHS recommends doing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity, per week. You can combine these fun ways to work out to meet your seven-day target.

Got 45 minutes? Try...

3 ZUMBA

Move to samba, salsa and mambo tunes in this dance-fitness class. It's great for weight loss, improves coordination and helps you let go of inhibitions. Not a natural dancer? 'If the arms and legs together feel complicated, concentrate on the feet, then add arms,' says Zumba education specialist Caroline Parsons. Find a free class on YouTube.

4 CLIMBING THE STAIRS

Go up and down repeatedly to get your heart pumping. You'll engage a large number of muscles in your legs, core and arms. Stay in the centre to stop yourself reaching for the handrail (if it's safe to do so). With nothing to hang on to, you'll use more muscles to help you climb. You'll be surprised how effective it is – and it's free!

EXERCISE SAFELY

Stay well-hydrated and rest if you need to. Chat to your GP if you feel any pain during or after a workout.

Let the water take pressure off your joints

Got an hour? Try...

5 WATER AEROBICS

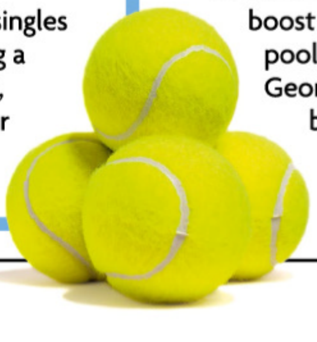
By exercising with the added resistance of water, you'll get fit without putting pressure on your joints. Plus, the water helps to keep you cool, so you can work harder without overheating.

6 HEAVY GARDENING

The pull-push action of raking and mowing helps to build strong arms, and tasks that involve digging and shovelling are a full-body exercise. Plus, scientists say smelling freshly cut grass boosts memory.

7 TENNIS

Whether you love singles or doubles, or just having a knockabout with friends, playing tennis works your arms, back, abs, bottom and legs.



Got 90 minutes? Try...

8 SALSA DANCING

Boost your overall fitness with this uplifting style of Latin dance. It has heart-healthy benefits, relieves stress and works your hips and waist, too.

9 SWIMMING

A low-impact workout that targets your whole body and gives you lean limbs – mix up your strokes to raise your heart rate. It's even recommended for those suffering from asthma. 'Women generally have a stronger lower than upper body, but you can boost your upper half in the pool,' suggests personal trainer Georgie Bloy. 'Place a float between your legs, then use just your upper body to push yourself through the water.'

10 CYCLING

Ideal for all ages, a bike ride can improve your posture, coordination and joint mobility. Don't shy away from the inclines – hills are good calorie-burners.

Got 2 hours or more? Try...

11 HIKING

Ditch the car and head off on a hike at least once a week. Reap the benefits of being outside and explore off the beaten track. Want a calorie-burning boost? Use poles. 'Holding on to walking poles means the upper body muscles are used as well as your legs,' says Gill Stewart from Nordic Walking UK. 'As you use the poles to propel yourself along, your body has to work harder.'

12 BOWLS

It may look relaxing, but this game builds muscle and burns calories. It also improves hand-eye coordination and balance.

13 GOLF

You might think of golf as a summer game, but it can actually be an enjoyable, low-intensity way to burn calories in the colder months – just be sure to wrap up. And, with the length of a golf course being between 3-6 miles, carrying clubs around the greens is a great weight-bearing exercise, ideal for bone health.

PHOTOS: GETTY. *WE ARE UNDEFEATABLE. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP

NO MORE BISCUITS FOR BREAKFAST

Gill Parkin, 58, knew she had to curb her addiction

Pushing the pack of Bourbons and bars of chocolates to the back of the cupboard, I hid them with tins of beans and bags of rice. I didn't want my husband Tom, then 53, to see them so I usually waited until he'd gone to bed before I pulled them from their hiding place and scoffed the lot.

> 'IT WAS ALL TOO EASY TO SNACK AWAY'

It was February 2022 and my eating habits were out of control. I'd always struggled with my weight and often signed up to weight-loss programmes like Weight Watchers, but my willpower never lasted and I'd end up yo-yoing with the same couple of pounds before quitting.

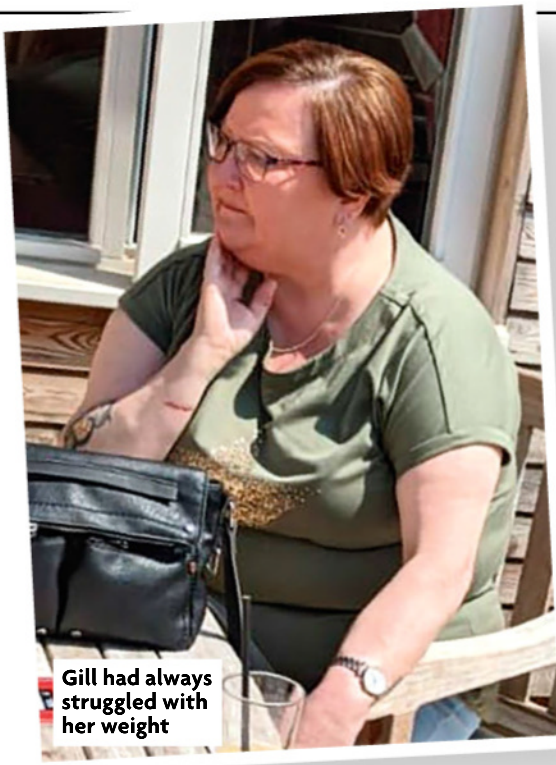
I'd been off-programme since June 2021 and my diet had completely fallen apart.

Instead of eating three nutritious meals a day plus healthy snacks, I munched my way through an entire packet of biscuits for breakfast most mornings, before favouring crisps, cake or chocolate over a proper meal at lunch. I was a sugar addict! And working in a petrol station I was surrounded by chocolate bars, crisps and biscuits. It was all too easy to buy some treats and snack away all day.

Then back home for teatime, I'd prepare hearty meals of spaghetti bolognese, but I always piled the portions high, never weighing out the correct amount of spaghetti and burying the meaty tomato sauce under a mountain of cheese.

LIVING IN DENIAL

I knew I was putting on weight but I convinced myself I was fine. I ignored my breathlessness when I walked up the stairs to bed and never looked in the mirror, telling myself that I didn't look as big as I was. While I daren't step foot on the scales, I couldn't deny that I was struggling to fit into my size-20 dresses.


Gill had always struggled with her weight

And it wasn't just the way I looked that I was ignoring. A type-two diabetic, I relied on injecting insulin to keep my blood sugar level under control but all my snacking and gorging on sugary biscuits meant my blood sugar was constantly high. 'You need to come in again,' my doctor said on the phone after my sugars had soared yet again.

SHOCKED INTO ACTION

Eventually, my doctor offered me a new weekly injection alongside my regular daily insulin but I knew that if my diet continued the way it was, the new medication would be practically pointless.

Then posing for a picture with my friends at a wedding, I grabbed my phone back. Catching sight of myself, I couldn't believe I'd been trying to fool myself for so long. 'I need to start looking after myself,' I told Tom. Reassuring me that he'd

WORDS: ASHLEIGH PAGE. BISCUIT PHOTO: ALAMY

Gill's diet

BEFORE

Breakfast Whole packet of biscuits

Dinner Crisps, cake or chocolate

Tea Big portion of spaghetti bolognese, topped with lots of cheese

Snacks More chocolate and crisps

DIET NOW

Breakfast Porridge or egg on toast

Dinner Chicken salad

Tea Jacket potato with tuna and salad

Snacks Sour rocket ice lolly or low-calorie chocolate bar

At her heaviest

Congratulations
Reaching her target

BOURBON
BOURBON
BOURBON

support me no matter what, I contacted my previous Weight Watchers coach, Karen.

She explained that the plan had changed since I'd last tried it. There was a new points system where different foods were assigned points and each day I'd get 21 points as well as an additional 21 points to use throughout the week. You could earn points back through exercise and eating certain foods like fruits and veg.

'I WISH I'D DONE IT YEARS AGO'

There were also foods on the plan that I could eat as much of as I wanted, such as chicken, seafood and eggs.

Feeling more determined than I ever had before when trying the plan, I decided to give it another go in March 2022.

Standing on the scales at my first group back, I was stunned to see I was 15st 3lb. At 5ft 4in, that made me obese, and it was the biggest I'd ever been. But instead of making me feel like I was embarking on an impossible task, it spurred me on. I set my goal weight at 11st and that first week, I swapped my biscuit breakfast for porridge. Lunch was a chicken salad and for dinner I'd cook a jacket potato with tuna and salad. With my points, I was even able to have a sour rocket ice lolly for dessert to curb my sweet cravings.

By the next weigh in, just a week later, I'd lost 6lb and felt incredible.

As I stuck to the plan, the weight kept dropping off each week. But of course, there were days when I struggled. 'What I'd do for a chocolate digestive,' I sighed to Tom. But instead of giving in to my cravings, I took low-calorie chocolate bars to work with me and kept focused on my weight loss.

Now Gill finally feels in control

NEW CONFIDENCE

I began to notice that my blood sugar lowered and stayed more consistent and I didn't need to visit the doctor as often.

In August 2022, I attended a cousin's wedding. By now, I'd lost almost 3st and my confidence had rocketed. 'I barely recognised you!' my cousin said.

Then, in September 2022, just six months after starting Weight Watchers, I stepped on the scale at group to find I'd hit my goal. I was chuffed!

I continued to attend the group and now I'm 10st 12lb. I even bought a size-12 jumper recently, something I wouldn't have fitted into for years.

Clothes shopping is now my favourite thing but I still automatically head towards the plus-sized sections before remembering my new size!

Since losing the weight, my blood sugar has stayed completely stable and I feel so much more in control of my health and my diabetes. I wish I'd lost weight years ago but I'm so glad that I've done it now.

✣ The updated Weight Watchers programme helps you to eat the food you love while still losing weight. You'll get a personalised plan that fits around your life, helps you to eat well, live well, and re-programme your relationship with food using the Points system. This includes 200+ ZeroPoint foods that you can eat any time. Find out more at weightwatchers.com/uk/how-it-works

FAB & FIT IN *THEIR 50s*

What are these celebs' secrets?

AGE: 50
AGE: 53

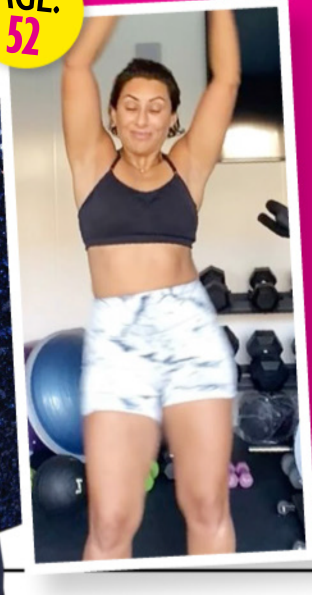
CLAUDIA WINKLEMAN

Strictly's Claudia not only pulled off a 24-hour danceathon with pal Tess Daly in 2019, but also took up walking during lockdown. And her toned physique has inspired us to step it up, too!

TESS DALY

With legs for days and a body we dream of, it's not hard to guess why Tess was a model from the age of 18. These days she works out two or three times a week with personal trainer Sam Shaw, as well as running and doing yoga classes. Teach us your ways, Tess.

AGE: 52



SAIRA KHAN

Walking the dog first thing in the morning is one of Saira's favourite ways to exercise. But to keep her bum looking peachy, Saira also does weighted squats and lunges, along with cardio.

AGE: 52

JULIA BRADBURY

Her breast cancer diagnosis in September 2021 saw Julia Bradbury view her body in a new way. She looks amazing, but these days Julia exercises for health, not aesthetics. Whether it's a walk in the park, stretching or something a little more strenuous, it keeps her body and mind as healthy as possible.

WORDS: ARIANA LONGSON. PHOTOS: BBC/GUY LEVY, GETTY, INSTAGRAM @TESSDALY, @IAMSAIRAKHAN, @THEREALJULIABRADBURY, @LISA_SNOWDON, @NOHOLDENBACK, @DAVINAMCCALL, @JENNYPOWELLTV

AMANDA HOLDEN

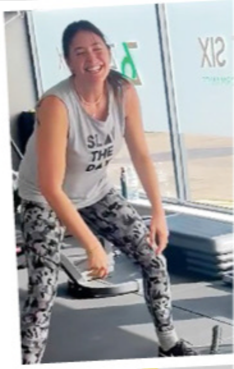
Not a fan of the gym, Amanda runs three times a week, for 36 minutes at a time – to be precise – in order to keep her svelte figure. No wonder she's regularly scantily clad. If you've got it, flaunt it!

AGE: 51

AGE: 50

LISA SNOWDON

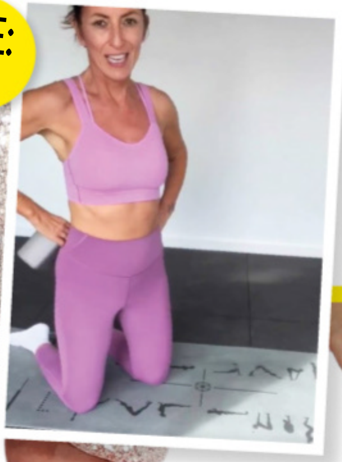
As a former model, Lisa has always been in fantastic shape. Nowadays she hits the gym to build strength and muscle, burn fat and improve bone density. After all, a healthy body is a happy body.



DAVINA MCCALL

She's a fitness fanatic who works out four to five times a week, so it's not surprising that Davina has washboard abs and toned pins. Can being more like Davina be a New Year's resolution?

AGE: 55



AGE: 54

JENNY POWELL

Another big fan of yoga is TV presenter Jenny. She, however, opts for hot yoga – done in hot and humid conditions, it results in considerable sweating. In addition to that, Jenny lifts kettlebells and does strength training at home, giving her muscles a toned look.

I DIDN'T WANT TO

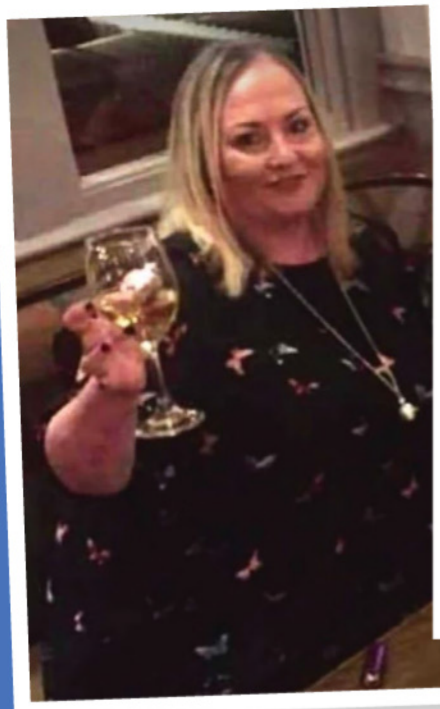
Her grandchildren gave Gail Cuffe, 54, motivation to undergo a transformation

Being a grandmother has been one of the biggest pleasures of my life. I've loved seeing my grandchildren walk their first steps, hear them say 'nanna' for the first time and watch as they play and laugh with such joy. And now I'm 5st lighter, I can enjoy these moments so much more. Finally, I am able to run around with them. But it's taken a long time to get here.

HIDING AWAY

I hadn't always been big. Up until I had children, I was a size 14 and weighed around 11st. But after Charlotte was born in January 1991 and Hayley the year after, I ballooned to 15st and a size 20. My husband Mark, now 57, always told me that I was beautiful, but that didn't stop me from feeling self-conscious, hiding myself away under baggy clothes.

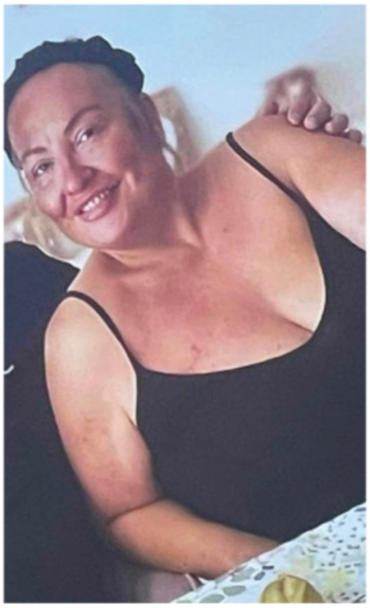
I started hiding from the scales too, dreading the misery of weighing myself. For so long I carried on this way, and it was only years later that I finally faced reality. Here, I look back at my weight-loss journey...



OCTOBER 2018

Bigger than ever

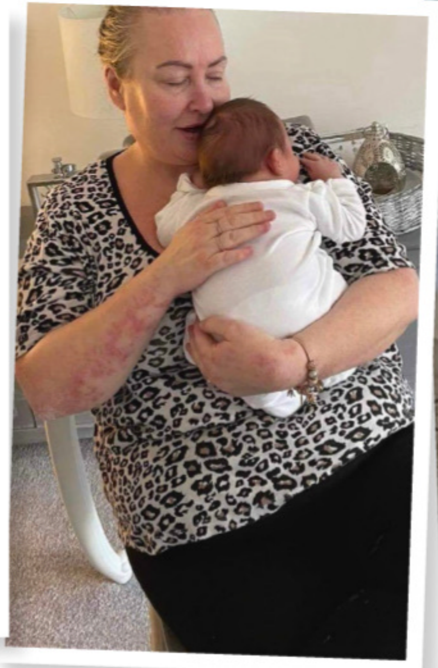
With the girls grown up, in April 2015, I decided to open my own beauty salon. I worked long hours, and skipped breakfast and lunch, drinking around five cans of fizzy pop throughout the day to keep me going. By the evening, I'd be starving, so I'd meet Mark, who works for a gas supplier, and we'd go out for a meal most nights. If we fancied a night in, we'd order a takeaway instead. But being surrounded by so many beautiful people at the salon made me question my own appearance. Everyone else was so slim. Although my personality was big and bubbly, so was my belly. Braving the scales, I was in for a shock... 16st 7lb.



DECEMBER 2019

Health scare

Too embarrassed to face up to the truth, I hid behind frumpy size 24 clothes. But in December 2019, I felt a strange fluttering sensation in my chest. After spending a whole night tossing and turning in bed, suffering from heart palpitations, I went to A&E. 'Your blood pressure is sky high,' the doctor told me. Explaining I was morbidly obese, she said I was at risk of suffering from a stroke, heart attack or diabetes if I didn't lose weight. Immediately, I cut out fizzy drinks and ditched the takeaways, but when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, in March 2020, I was forced to close the salon for good. Stuck at home, it made it so much harder to stay on track with the weight loss.

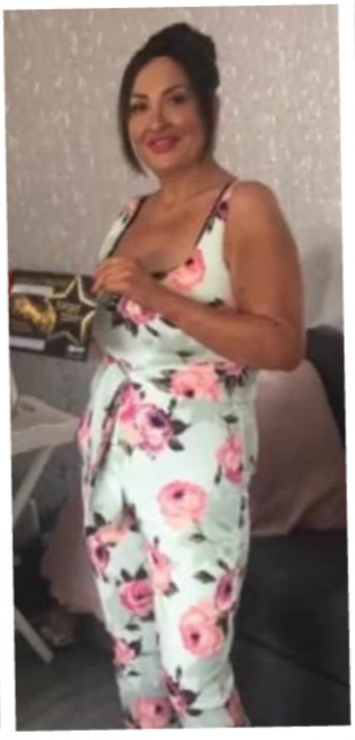


JULY 2021

Wibble wobble

In July 2021, I became a grandmother again after my daughter Charlotte gave birth to Charlie – I was already a grandma to Charlotte's son Vinnie, then one, and Hayley's boys Alfie, three, and Tommy, six months. As I cuddled baby Charlie, I felt a rush of love. My family meant everything to me, and I adored spending time with the boys. But when Alfie would climb on my lap for a hug, he would always prod and poke my tummy. 'Wibble wobble, fat nanna,' he'd laugh. And as Mark chased the boys around the garden, I'd just sit and watch. I really wished that my grandkids had a nanna who could run around with them.

BE A *FAT NANNA*



AUGUST 2021

The last straw

Since my health scare, I'd lost around a stone and was feeling a little slimmer in my size 20 summer clothes when Mark and I decided to take a much-needed holiday to Crete in August 2021. Every day, we passed the same man, offering samples of local cheese and ham from his shop. 'No thank you,' I smiled, politely. 'You always say no to food, but you are such a big woman!' he laughed in return. My heart sank.

> 'IT FELT LIKE I WAS EATING MORE FOOD THAN EVER'

DECEMBER 2021

Change is coming

Determined to change, in September 2021, I joined Slimming World. I loved the idea of no food being forbidden, but when I weighed in at 15st 9.5lb, it felt like I had a long way to go. I started having cereal and fruit for breakfast, followed by a tuna or ham salad for lunch, and for dinner I'd make roast chicken, pasta or lasagne. I was so used to skipping meals that it felt like I was eating more food than ever, but in the first week, I lost 8lb! By December 2021, I'd lost 2st 11lb. Slipping into a slinky red dress at Christmas felt fantastic.

JUNE 2022

New me!

I discovered 'fakeaways' and loved the challenge of recreating my favourite takeaway food, such as fried chicken, Chinese noodles and curries, with Slimming World recipes. I realised how much I enjoyed cooking. Staying on plan, I continued to lose around 2lb per week and, by my birthday in June 2022, I'd reached my target of losing 5st. I was so delighted that I threw a party at my house with Slimming-World-friendly nibbles and drinks, and invited the whole group. Posing with my certificate in a size 12 mint jumpsuit with pretty pink roses, I felt so proud of myself. Despite the party, we all still lost a few pounds that week!

OCTOBER 2022

Glam gran

With my new figure, I wanted a wardrobe to match, so to celebrate my weight loss I treated myself to clothes that I would never have dared wear before I slimmed to 10st 7lb. When Mark took me out for a meal, I wore a feathered black jumpsuit with pink accessories, determined to stand out for all the right reasons! I finally felt like one of the glamorous girls from my salon days, but the ultimate seal of approval was when Alfie, now four, sat on my lap and pulled me in for a cuddle. 'You're a glam nanna now!' he said. A perfect result!

WORDS: FRANCESCA WOODSTOCK, JADE BEECROFT

PAULA MOORE
Group Fashion Director

HANNAH HUGHES,
Group Fashion Editor

CHARLIE BELL
Deputy Fashion Editor

BECKY JOINER O'RIORDAN
Senior Fashion Stylist and Writer

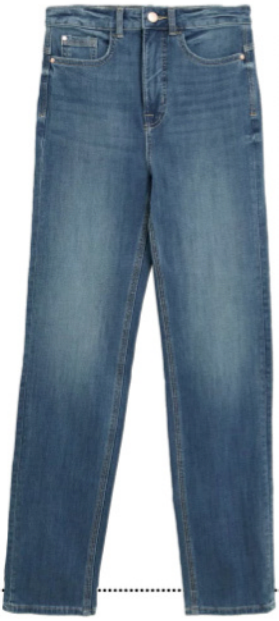
fashion expert

Cheat yourself slim

Boost your confidence with these savvy tricks and tips from our style team

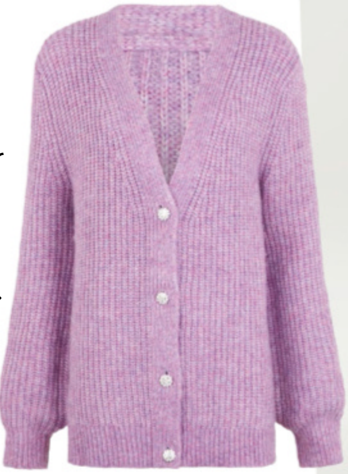
Genius jeans

Not just any jeans, these are M&S magic jeans designed with clever technology to flatten the tummy and lift the bum. Details such as a gap-proof waistband, shaping darts and a stretchy finish mean they fit like a dream too. Swap skinnies for this straight-leg pair for a contemporary look. **Jeans, £45, sizes 6-24, M&S** *Hannah*



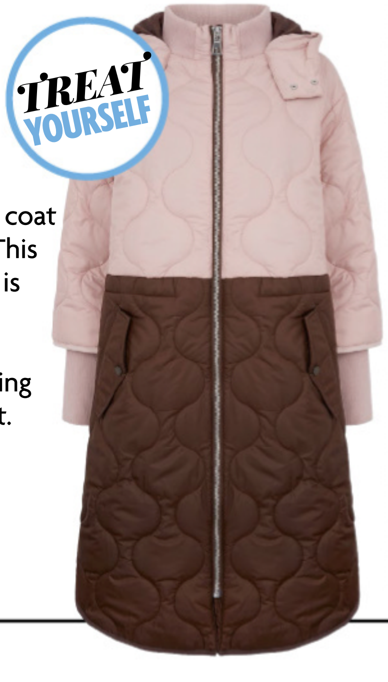
Cocktail cardigan

Knitwear season is in full swing and this year I'm loving the cosy cardigan. This longline version helps to streamline your shape. If you want extra definition, try a belt. The sparkly buttons add a luxe touch. **Cardigan, £35, sizes 8-18, Very; belt, £15.99, Parfois** *Charlie*



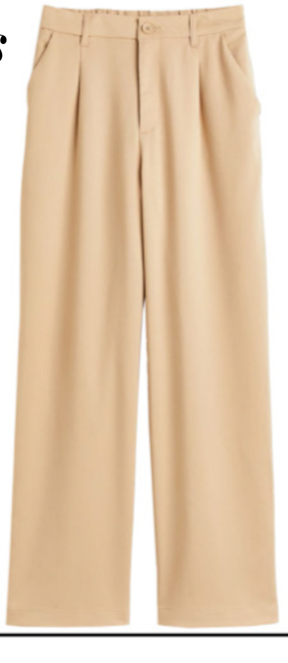
Padded power

One of the most coveted looks of the season, a quilted coat is practical too. This two-tone design is perfect for pear shapes, with the darker panel having a slimming effect. It also features a drawcord waist. **Coat, £80, sizes xs-xxl, Next** *Paula*



Wide strides

Wide-leg trousers have serious leg-lengthening powers. Not only that, they're delightfully comfy. These sit high on the waist and feature flattering pleats. Team with a tucked-in top to highlight your middle and add heels if you want to elongate your legs even more, or swap for trainers. **Trousers, £15.99, sizes 8-22, H&M** *Charlie*



COMPILED BY: CHARLIE BELL. PHOTOS: LIZ MCAULAY PHOTOGRAPHY

Jumper, £18, sizes xs-xl, jeans, £18, sizes 8-24, boots, £22.50, earrings, £6, necklace, £6, all George at Asda

Dress, £44, sizes 8-22, boots, £36, both M&Co

DARK JEANS WITH A HIGH WAIST WILL FLATTER YOUR FIGURE

Dress to impress

When it comes to showing off your shape, this ticks all the boxes. The wrap design flatters the bust and cinches you in at the waist before flaring out. Team with some high boots and let the compliments roll in.

Dress, £33.99, sizes 8-22, New Look

Hannah

Smart shapewear

This has come a long way from the previous uncomfortable and restrictive styles. Whether you go for a lightweight slip or tummy-control briefs, these are great for smoothing your silhouette.

Brief, £30, sizes 10-20; slip, £32, sizes 10-20, both Pour Moi

Becky

BRANDS TO BOOKMARK

1

BEST FOR... PLUS SIZE

Catering for up to size 32, Yours is your one-stop-shop for affordable plus size clothing. Whether you're in need of a jeans update or a fancy frock, their virtual shelves are jam-packed with stylish garms.

yoursclothing.co.uk

2

BEST FOR... PETITE CLOTHING

This month, occasionwear pros Phase Eight are launching a petite range for women of 5ft 4in and under. So no more taking up hems!

phase-eight.com

3

BEST FOR... WIDE-FIT SHOES

These can be hard to come by but New Look has really nailed it with their mix of classics such as Chelsea boots and trend-led pieces.

newlook.com

4

BEST FOR... SUPPORTIVE UNDERWEAR

Once you've tried Heist's revolutionary underwear, you'll never look back. Super supportive, soft against the skin and up to size 22.

heist-studios.com

LOW-CAL MEALS

350 CALS OR LESS

Sweet or savoury, we've got you covered with these light and easy recipes

PREP TIME: 15 MINS
COOK TIME: 20 MINS
CALS: 303 **FAT:** 5G
SAT FAT: 1G **CARBS:** 48G

Gyoza miso noodle soup

SERVES 4

Warming and cosy yet surprisingly light, this soup is great for the colder evenings and uses a pack of ready-made Japanese-style gyoza dumplings.

YOU WILL NEED

100g dried rice noodles
1.5ltr vegetable stock
4cm piece root ginger, thinly sliced
2tbsp white miso paste
1tbsp soy sauce
1tbsp mirin/rice wine
200g mixed mushrooms, sliced if large
100g baby pak choi, halved, or spring greens, shredded
100g bean sprouts
Olive oil spray
20 frozen vegetable gyoza
Chopped red chilli, black sesame seeds and lime wedges, to serve

HOW TO DO IT

1 Place the noodles in a heatproof bowl, cover with boiling water and set aside for 8 mins to soften, then drain.

2 Meanwhile, place the stock in a large saucepan. Add the ginger, miso, soy sauce and mirin. Bring to a simmer, add the mushrooms and cook gently for 2 mins.

3 Stir in the greens and the bean sprouts. Cook gently for 3 mins until the vegetables are tender.

4 Meanwhile, spritz a non-stick frying pan with oil and cook the gyoza until golden and thawed.

5 Divide the noodles and gyoza between 4 bowls and ladle in the soup. Garnish with sliced chilli and a sprinkle of sesame seeds. Serve with lime wedges for squeezing over.

TIP USING A GOOD NON-STICK FRYING PAN IS A GREAT WAY TO KEEP THE AMOUNT OF OIL YOU NEED TO USE TO A MINIMUM.

PREP TIME: 20 MINS
COOK TIME: 4 MINS
CALS: 306 **FAT:** 14G
SAT FAT: 4G **CARBS:** 11G

TIP THIS HEALTHY OPTION HAS PROTEIN AND FIBRE TO HELP FILL YOU UP, BUT IF YOU FEEL EXTRA HUNGRY, SERVE WITH A CUP OF SOUP.

Green goddess chicken salad

SERVES 2

The avocado in this dressing makes a delicious thick and creamy-tasting sauce. Think Caesar salad, but with less cals.

YOU WILL NEED

150g Tenderstem broccoli
2 Little Gem lettuce, leaves separated
6cm piece cucumber, thinly sliced
6 radishes, thinly sliced
150g leftover roast chicken, shredded, any skin removed
4 salad onions, thinly sliced
½tbsp crispy onions
Salad cress, to garnish
For the dressing:
1 baby avocado, stoned and diced
1 small garlic clove
4tbsp 0% fat Greek-style natural yogurt
Finely grated zest and juice of ½ lemon
1tbsp roughly chopped fresh tarragon or coriander

HOW TO DO IT

1 To make the dressing, place all the ingredients in a blender and whizz until smooth. Check the seasoning and add a splash of water if it's a little thick.

2 Blanch the broccoli in a pan of boiling, lightly salted water for 3-4 mins until tender, then drain and cool under running water.

3 Arrange the lettuce, cucumber, radishes, cooked broccoli, chicken and salad onions on two serving plates.

4 Drizzle over the dressing then scatter with crispy onions and salad cress.

Ham hock and red pepper frittata

PREP TIME: 15 MINS
COOK TIME: 20 MINS
CALS: 350 FAT: 20G
SAT FAT: 8G CARBS: 12.5G

SERVES 4

Simple to make and satisfying to eat, this frittata is low in calories and it'll be ready in just a few minutes.

YOU WILL NEED

1tbsp olive oil
2 romano peppers, deseeded and thinly sliced
6 medium eggs
50g fresh wholemeal breadcrumbs
6 spring onions, thinly sliced
180g pack shredded ham hock
2tbsp chopped parsley
75g taleggio or mature Cheddar, cut into small dice
Green salad, to serve
You will need:
20cm non-stick ovenproof frying pan

HOW TO DO IT

1 Heat the oil in the frying pan. Add the peppers and cook gently for 10 mins until softened.

2 Meanwhile, crack the eggs into a large bowl and beat well. Stir in the breadcrumbs, spring onions, ham hock and herbs, then lightly season. Stir in the cooked peppers.

3 Heat the grill to medium. Pour the egg mixture into the hot pan, then cook on a very low heat for 6-7 mins, until the egg is almost completely set. Scatter over the cheese, pressing the diced pieces lightly into the frittata.

4 Place the pan under the grill for 2-3 mins until golden brown and cooked through. Slide onto a chopping board and cut into wedges. Serve with salad.

TIP MAKE MORE BREADCRUMBS THAN YOU NEED AND FREEZE THE EXCESS. THEY THAW IN MINUTES AND ARE A GREAT WAY OF USING UP STALE BREAD.

TIP SWAP THE LIME FOR LEMON IF YOU PREFER, AND USE COCONUT YOGURT TO MAKE THESE DAIRY-FREE.

PREP TIME: 25 MINS, PLUS 3HRS CHILLING
CALS: 104 **FAT:** 5G
SAT FAT: 4G **CARBS:** 10G

Zingy mini lime cheesecake bites

MAKES 18

The perfect light after-dinner treat, these little cheesecakes are delicious and only 104 cals per serving!

YOU WILL NEED

For the base:
100g low-fat digestives biscuits
50g porridge oats
50g desiccated coconut
4tbsp coconut oil, melted
For the filling:
Juice and zest 1 lime, plus extra for garnish (optional)
75ml agave syrup
3 gelatine leaves
450g 0% fat strained Greek yogurt we used Fage
To decorate:
3 figs, sliced into thin wedges
1tsp agave syrup
You will need:
Paper or silicone fairy cake cases or a greased silicone mould

HOW TO DO IT

1 Crush or blitz the biscuits to a fine crumb then combine with the oats, coconut and coconut oil. Divide between your cases or mould and press firmly to create the base. Chill while you prepare the filling.

2 Gently warm the lime juice in a small pan. Soften the gelatine in cold water for 5 mins then squeeze out the excess water and stir the gelatine into the lime juice until dissolved. Set aside to cool a little.

3 Combine the gelatine mixture in a bowl with the lime zest, agave syrup and yogurt. Divide evenly between the bases. Chill for 3hrs or overnight.

4 When ready to serve, top with the sliced fig a little drizzle of agave and some extra lime zest, if liked.

TIP **SWAP BANANAS WITH FROZEN MIXED BERRIES FOR A MORE COLOURFUL VERSION.**

PREP TIME: **5 MINS, PLUS FREEZING**
CALS: **64** **FAT:** **2.5G**
SAT FAT: **0.5G** **CARBS:** **7.5G**

Banana and peanut frozen yogurt

SERVES 6

An instant dessert for when you're short on time and need something sweet to satisfy those cravings.

YOU WILL NEED

2 bananas, thickly sliced
2tbsp crunchy peanut butter
4tbsp low-fat Greek-style yogurt

HOW TO DO IT

1 Freeze the sliced banana in an airtight container until it has frozen solid.

2 Take out of the freezer, put into a blender with the peanut butter and yogurt. Whizz until smooth and combined.

3 Serve straight away or spoon into a loaf tin/plastic container, wrapped well, then freeze for up to 1 week.

FEATURE COMPILED BY ROSE FOOKS. FUTURE CONTENT HUB

Supermarket SAVERS

Our round-up of the best deals this week

SAVE £12.55

Tins for the win

Tinned foods often get a bad rep, but there are many advantages to using these handy store cupboard staples...

VITAMIN FIX
Beans and lentils are packed full of fibre, vitamins and minerals. Start introducing them in meals that are full of flavour like curry or in fajitas to replace expensive meat. They add flavour and texture to the dish and also count towards your five a day.

SPEEDY SUPPER
Tins are handy when you're short on time. Often pre-prepared and cooked, it means you don't have to waste precious time. A great example are tinned potatoes, simply serve the peeled and cooked spuds as a side or use to bulk out a frittata or stew.

COST CUTTER
Generally, tinned foods are cheaper than fresh, but their nutritional values are very similar. They also last much longer (almost forever in a cupboard) so it's very unlikely any items will end up in the bin!

WORDS: GEORGIA SPARKS. PHOTOS: GETTY

3 great deals for your trolley!

GUT GOODNESS

Gut-Loving Yogurts Bio&Me, 350g, Sainsbury's

NEW
Bio&Me
Mango
GUT-LOVING PREBIOTIC YOGHURT

~~WAS £2~~
NOW £1.50

THE PROTEIN BALL CO.
THE PROTEIN BALL CO.
THE PROTEIN BALL CO.

~~WAS £1.50~~
NOW £1

BOUNCE BACK

The Protein Ball Co. Vitamin balls in a selection of flavours, 45g, Morrisons

HYDRATION STATION

Upbeat drinks Protein Hydration, Zesty Orange and Mixed Berry, 500ml, Sainsbury's

UPBEAT
UPBEAT

~~WAS £1.65~~
NOW £1.10

Ditch the diet

TREAT YOURSELF

6 LOLLIES
Nestlé
fab
Cadbury
DAIRY MILK
buttons
4

2 for £3.50

Two for £3.50 across a variety of ice creams at Morrisons. Choose from chocolatey ice creams such as Dairy Milk Buttons or refreshing Fab lollies.

Use it up!

Making the ham hock and red pepper frittata On p58? Here are just a few ways you can use up your parsley...

ADD to softened butter and crushed garlic, use for delicious garlic bread.

CHOP and add to couscous with mint, olive oil, lemon juice and seasoning for a light lunch.

ADD to stock for a flavour boost or add to your potato cooking water for a fresher flavour.

TIP TO STORE FRESH HERBS, PUT IN A JAR WITH A LITTLE WATER AND PUT IN FRIDGE. CHANGE WATER OFTEN.

Bargain booze

Waitrose have some great savings across a huge selection of wines, here's three of the best...

TILIMUQUI
MALBEC
MOSS BROTHERS
MOSES ROCK
FORTE ALTO
PINOT GRIGIO

~~WAS £11.99~~
NOW £7.99

~~WAS £12.99~~
NOW £8.99

~~WAS £9.79~~
NOW £6.79

MONEY matters

Our expert Rebecca Gamble helps make your cash go further

READER QUESTION

Q I've heard the term 'money mule' a few times recently. Can you explain what it means?

A Money mules are people who use their bank account to receive criminal cash. People can be duped or pressured into it through social media, fake job ads or emails, promising cash in exchange for making transfers, withdrawing and depositing money. There's been a sharp rise in people aged over 40 acting as money mules in the last year, says Lloyds Bank, but under-24s are most likely to commit the crime.

Go green for less

Check out this Chimney Sheep draught excluder (from £18) – it could cut household energy bills by 5%. It works by blocking heat from escaping up an unused chimney and is easy to remove when you want to light a fire. (chimneysheep.co.uk)

3 easy ways to...

ensure you keep your money resolutions for 2023

Changing how you manage your cash? Stay on track with these expert tips

1 SET A MONTHLY TARGET

When you're setting money resolutions, be specific about what you want to achieve and plan how to get there. Instead of a general target to 'spend less and save more', go carefully through your finances, work out where you can cut back and how much it's realistic to save each month. It means you'll have a monthly goal and be able to track your progress.

2 FIND YOUR MOTIVATION

Think about why you're making your money resolution. If you're saving for something specific, like a house deposit, keep a picture of your dream house where you can see it. It will make it much easier to resist an impulse buy if you know it will take you a step away from reaching your goal. And with a longer term goal, break it down into smaller targets along the way. You could also celebrate meeting those targets with little rewards to keep you motivated.

3 GATHER SUPPORT

Sticking to a resolution is easier if you don't go it alone. Do you have any friends who are also trying to make positive changes to their finances? You can swap tips, share your progress and encourage each other. And you can also find support online, such as on money-saving groups on Facebook.

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. *SOURCE: SURVEY OF 2,000 PEOPLE CARRIED OUT BY OPINIUM ON BEHALF OF HARGREAVES LANSDOWN, SEPTEMBER 2022

NEED TO KNOW

How to support charities without spending cash

DONATE YOUR CASHBACK

When shopping online, try using cashback sites like TopCashback (topcashback.co.uk) – you can donate what you 'earn' to charity through the site. Just pick from one of the hundreds of charities when you pay out your cashback; you can donate all or some of it as you wish.

OFFER YOUR TIME

If you have any spare time on your hands, consider helping a charity. At doit.life/volunteer, you can search more than a million volunteering opportunities by interest, activity or location. Many of the opportunities are online, so you can help from home if that works better for you.

CARE WITH HAIR

If you have long hair and you're planning a major chop, you could donate it to The Little Princess Trust. It provides real hair wigs to children and young people who have lost their hair due to cancer treatment and other illnesses. Hair has to be clean, in a good condition, over 30cm long and no more than 10% grey. For more info, visit littleprincesses.org.uk.

23%

OF PEOPLE SAY THEY HAVE LOST TRACK OF A PENSION*

Top tip!

Make sure the gifts you received for Christmas – or that you gave to others in your household – are covered on your home insurance, especially if you were lucky enough to get an expensive item, like jewellery or a new bike. If you're not sure, call your insurer.

Deal of the week

Bali Breeze
SO…?
BODY MIST
Brume Pour Le Corps
200ml e 6.9 fl.oz

Snap up a So…? Escapes Body Mist (200ml) at Tesco. The range, including Bali Breeze, which has notes of coconut, pineapple and orange blossom, is on offer for Clubcard members. NORMALLY £5, OFFER £3, until 24 January 2023. Offer only applies to 200ml bottles. Subject to availability. Offer correct at time of going to press.

If you do one thing…

CHECK OVERDRAFT FEES

Going overdrawn is eye-wateringly expensive, especially with some bank accounts charging up to 39.9% EAR (effective annual rate). So if your bank charges a high rate of interest, it may be worth checking to see if you can switch to an account that offers a lower one – particularly if you use an overdraft regularly.

IF YOU LOVE TO WIN PRIZES THEN VISIT…

comps.womansownmagazine.co.uk

I GAVE MY BROTHER A BABY

Charley Mellon, 37, made her brother's dream come true

Jon (left) and Patrick were there for Wren's birth

Hurtling along the street, my brother overtook me and began to sprint towards our house. Patrick was two years younger than me and always had a streak of mischief about him. It was May 2000, we were on our way home from school and I had a second sense that he'd spring a surprise on me when I reached the house.

I tried to push open the front door but something was stopping me. Gales of laughter erupted from the other side. Patrick had opened the toilet door just behind our front door, blocking me from getting into the house. I had to wait until his mirth subsided and he eventually let me in.

Another time I arrived home to be met with a soaking as Patrick aimed a water pistol at me. 'Got you,' came his cheeky voice, followed by his familiar roar of laughter. I pretended to be annoyed, but it was impossible to be mad at live wire Patrick for long. I was one of six siblings and would clap along as Patrick and our younger sister Aileen spun out crazy hip-hop routines.

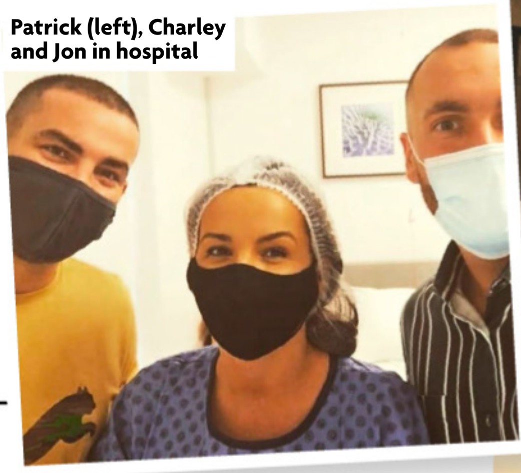
His personality was infectious. But I knew Patrick was different and so did the kids in our street – he was called names. When he was 19, he turned to me said, 'You know I'm gay?'

I nodded – I'd guessed. Our family was proud of him and wanted him to be happy.

> 'WE WANTED HIM TO BE HAPPY'

Patrick's zest for life always saw him the first one on the dance floor, but there wasn't much of a gay scene in Derry in 2006. I'd been dating my partner Damian since I was 17 and when our son Charlie was born in September 2014, Patrick was the doting uncle with lots of cuddles, but I always hoped he'd find someone special.

I was thrilled when he began chatting online to someone. And, after a few months, when he introduced me to Jon in 2015, I felt sure Patrick had found The One. Jon was a good influence on Patrick – coaxing and supporting him to give up smoking and encouraging him to pass his driving test.



Patrick (left), Charley and Jon in hospital

Growing bump

BIG DECISION

I was a bridesmaid when Patrick and Jon married in May 2016 at a country house hotel. The pair of them were wonderful uncles to Charlie. Sleepovers, treks out into the forest, games of pirates on a boat, Disney movies and popcorn – Charlie always raved about the wonderful time he had with them both.

'Wouldn't they make brilliant dads?' I remarked to Damian. Patrick and Jon had told me how much they'd like a child of their own. They looked into adoption, but at the time in Northern Ireland the system didn't favour same-sex couples. Next, they investigated surrogacy, but the costs were too high.

WORDS: MOIRA HOLDEN, JADE BEECROFT.
PHOTOS: INSTAGRAM @2DADSJOURNEY

My heart ached for them. By now I was pregnant with my second child. My family would be complete when this baby was born. I began to wonder if I could be a surrogate mum for Patrick and Jon, and give them what they so dearly wanted.

After Cerys was born in March 2017, I voiced my thoughts to Damian. 'It's a big decision,' he said, but he had no objection to my idea.

SMOOTHING THE WAY

'I want to be your surrogate,' I said firmly to Patrick. 'Are you sure?' he asked, over and over again.

We made an appointment at Belfast Fertility Clinic, deciding to use a donor egg because we didn't want the complication of me being called 'auntie' by a child who would be my biological child. I was to be the oven, that was all.

An anonymous donor who wanted to donate to a same-sex couple agreed to provide the eggs. Patrick and Jon didn't say which one of them had provided the sperm because they wanted the baby to be seen as theirs jointly. I didn't feel odd at the thought of carrying my brother's baby, but some people questioned what I was doing, so I had to explain that we'd be using a donor egg.

The first embryo was implanted successfully in July 2019. I was pregnant! Excitedly, we told the family. But three days before my 12-week scan, on my 34th birthday in August, I began to feel cramps. Patrick and Jon had just left my tea party when I started to bleed.

Charley gave an incredible gift

GROWING A BABY

We were all devastated. 'I promise we'll try again,' I said, tearfully. But COVID-19 delayed our plans, and it wasn't until October 2020 that another embryo transfer could take place. Again, I fell pregnant.

As my bump grew, I knew I'd have to try to explain to Charlie, then six, and Cerys, three, what was happening. 'Mummy is growing a baby for Uncle Patrick and Uncle Jon because they're boys so can't grow babies of their own,' I said. Matter-of-fact, they nodded their heads.

Even when I dealt with morning sickness and the aches and pains along the way of the pregnancy, I focused on the gift I was giving my beloved brother. And in June 2021, my waters broke. I left the kids with Damian, while my birth partners, Patrick and Jon, came with me to the hospital. Poor Patrick wasn't ready for the rigours of labour and thought I was dying at one point! 'It's OK, it's just the baby being born,' I panted.

INCREDIBLE MOMENT

After a four-hour labour, Wren came into the world, weighing 8lb 9oz. As soon as she was born, the midwife tried to pass her to me, but I said, 'No, give her to her dads.' It was an incredible moment when Patrick and Jon took off their T-shirts to have skin-to-skin contact with their daughter.

Back home, we all settled into our new roles – Patrick and Jon were finally parents and as for me, I became Wren's godmother. Although I carried her and gave birth to her, I love her in the same way I love my other nieces and nephews. I am definitely Auntie Charley. When Wren gets older, I'll tell her all about how mischievous her dad was when he was a little boy, and what an amazing man he's grown into.

Patrick and Jon have both embraced parenthood, relishing every aspect. They are wonderful dads – just as I predicted.

Patrick says:

'Charley and I have always been close, but I never thought my sister would carry my baby! For her to have done this for us was the most incredible gift – she had to put her life on hold to have a baby for us.

'During the labour, I was looking at her thinking, "How on earth is she even doing this?" I was completely blown away by how selfless she was and how much she was prepared to go through to give us Wren. We'll always tell Wren how she came to be here, growing in Auntie Charley's belly. She's the tummy mummy!'

A family at last

EXTREME TRAVELLERS

What inspires women to embark on the most challenging journeys? We talk to three epic adventurers

Raz (left) and Cat

The intrepid duo peddled around the globe

'We broke the world record'

Raz Marsden, 55, is a motor neurone disease nurse consultant from Oxford. In June 2019, she started a round-the-world trip on a tandem bicycle with Cat Dixon, 54, a CEO from Yorkshire.

Crossing the border from Myanmar to Thailand, it was nearly midnight, we'd run out of water and couldn't find anywhere to stay. Cat was not well, I felt sick, we'd had seven punctures over the past two days and now a slow puncture was threatening our back wheel. Alone, moments like this would have been completely overwhelming, but on a tandem bike, you're never alone. We were often hungry, exhausted and grumpy, but because we had each other, every day was filled with laughter.

BEATING THE MEN

Cat and I met on a charity bike ride from London to Paris five years ago. Both avid cyclists, she told me she dreamt of cycling around the world and I thought that sounded fun. We decided to try to beat the world record for circumnavigating the globe on a tandem bike, a record previously held by two men.

We took off from Oxford in June 2019 on a bike we named Alice. We cycled through thunderstorms, brutal headwinds, heatwaves, fog and hail. Alice went wrong often, usually miles from a repair shop, but we developed a deep love for her. Riding tandem is different from riding solo. As the stoker at the back, I don't steer, brake or change gear. We learnt to ride in sync and understand each other intuitively. We carried our own kit and our fully loaded weight was 200 kilos. We would fly downhill, gaining speeds of 50mph, and Cat doesn't like to brake! But we made it without falling off. We met so many generous people who invited us into their homes, gave us hot meals and plenty of encouragement. After Christmas in New Zealand, we flew to San Francisco, riding alongside the ancient redwoods of Big Sur. Then we flew to Morocco, where children cheered us on. In Spain, trees blossomed as winter gave way to spring.

'EVERY DAY WAS FILLED WITH LAUGHTER'

After 10 months, five continents, 25 countries and 18,263 miles, we beat the world record by 17-and-a-half days and raised over £40,000 for the Motor Neurone Disease Association and Oxfam. We hadn't just seen the world, we had forged an extraordinary friendship built on trust and a shared desire to follow our dreams and be kind to ourselves and others.

✣ Follow Raz and Cat's next adventure @tandemwow

'I stood where no human had stood before'

In 2018, Pip Stewart, 37, undertook the world's first source-to-sea paddle of the Essequibo River in Guyana, South America. Pip lives in West Sussex with her partner Charlie, 38, and their daughter Willow, two.

Pip took on the mighty Essequibo River

My desire to explore the world comes from curiosity and a fear that I might not live life to the full. In 2016, I travelled through Brazil and Peru with filmmaker Reza Pakravan to raise awareness of the impact of deforestation on indigenous communities. I listened to stories of family members murdered trying to protect land and I was changed forever.

In 2018, I did something I knew would put my life at risk – spending three months paddling the Essequibo River from source to sea. It's the third largest river in South America, yet no one had paddled its entire length, so with fellow adventurers Laura Bingham and Ness Knight, plus guides from the Wai-Wai community, we set out to be the first.

During the three-week hike to the river source in the Acarai Mountains in Guyana, I became very anxious. Jungles are visceral, especially at night when they growl with activity.

We trekked so deep into the jungle that our guide said it was doubtful any humans had stood where we were before. It was humbling to think more people had been to the moon than where we were. As we began our 1,000km paddle to the Atlantic Ocean, the river became our life source. We drank the water and fished for supper. But the creep of human impact began to materialise. We saw deforestation and dredging, and the water became contaminated by mercury from gold mines. Plastic bottles floated by.

Every day had the potential to end badly. Spiders, snakes, waterfalls and rapids made me feel simultaneously on edge, yet relaxed. When we reached the Atlantic, our palms calloused, our bums covered in sores, I'll never forget the sense of comradeship and joy.

'I'LL NEVER FORGET THE SENSE OF JOY'

MORE WORLD TO SAVE

I've also been an ambassador for Meridian, which makes 100% palm oil-free nut butters. An area the size of the UK has been deforested in Indonesia to make way for palm tree plantations, and I hope to visit soon to raise awareness of the plight of the orangutan.

✣ ***Life Lessons from the Amazon*** **by Pip Stewart (£9.99, Summersdale) is out now**

'My travels taught me how much good there is in the world'

In January 2019, retired lawyer Karen Penny, 56, started walking the coast of Britain and Ireland, raising funds for Alzheimer's Research UK. She lives in Swansea with her husband Mark, 62.

As Mark and I sipped our coffee on a bench overlooking the Gower, my hefty rucksack lay at my feet. Knowing I'd be away for more than two years, neither of us knew how to say goodbye. 'Keep me safe,' I said.

Karen spent more then two years walking

Mark's organised, I'm spontaneous. When I announced I wanted to walk the coast of Britain and Ireland, Mark was happy to stay home, plot my route and look after me from afar. Some people said it was overambitious to hope to raise £100,000 for Alzheimer's Research UK, but I needed to try. Our family was knocked sideways when Mark's wonderful parents, Alma and Kingsley, developed dementia. Alma forgot where she was during their golden wedding anniversary party and was soon diagnosed with vascular dementia. She died aged 77, in 2008. Kingsley had Alzheimer's disease, and by the end of his life in 2016, he no longer recognised us.

I felt an urgency to raise awareness and funds. On average, I walked 15 miles a day but during a heatwave on the Isle of Man Mark had me walking two 26-mile days back to back! No woman had completed the walk and I made it more challenging when I added more than 100 islands.

'I FELT AN URGENCY TO RAISE FUNDS'

TARGET SMASHED

I finished at Britain's more northerly point, Hermaness, on World Alzheimer's Day, 21 September 2021, raising more than £126,000 for Alzheimer's Research UK to continue its research into prevention, treatments and, maybe one day, a cure for this cruel disease.

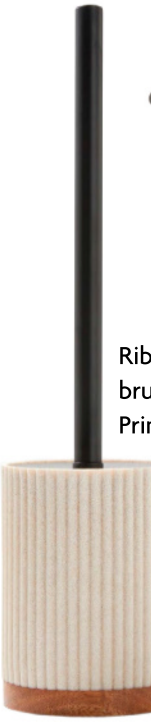
I got through 10 pairs of boots, but I'm not done. In April 2022, I started walking the county boundaries of Britain. This time, Mark is with me. To everyone who helped or donated, thank you – my travels taught me how much good there is in the world.

✣ **To donate, visit justgiving.com/fundraising/thepennyrollson**

WORDS: KIM WILLIS. PIP STEWART PHOTOS: JON WILLIAMS

30 BUDGET B

Give your bathroom a fresh new look without breaking the bank


Ribbed toilet brush, £6, Primark

Metal jewellery stand, £18.99, H&M Home

Decorative tray, £10, JYSK

Jute storage baskets, £14 for two, Primark

Large glazed decorative jug, £29.50, M&S

Ochre bamboo bath rack, £10, Dunelm

Matte black wire corner caddy, £7, George Home

Wash your Hands you filthy Animal
Wash your hands print, from £22 (without frame), iamfy.co

Waffled shower curtain, £17.99, H&M Home

Seagrass laundry basket, £24.99, H&M Home

Black resin soap dispenser, £12.99, Zara Home

Three-wick candle, £22, Monsoon

Black resin tumbler, £7.99, Zara Home

FEATURE: ESME CLEMO. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING

UYS

ALL UNDER £30

Chunky ribbed pillar candles, from £8 each, joebrowns.co.uk

Bamboo mirror, £15, Flying Tiger

Metal planter, £20, Matalan

Wavy board, £9, Matalan

Juniper wall light, £30, bhs.com

Towels, from £3 each, Dunelm

Wicker black pattern matt porcelain wall and floor tile, £19.95 per sq m, tilemountain.co.uk

Ribbed bathroom storage jar, £6, Primark

Amber glass vase, £10.99, HomeSense

Marrakech Collection towels, from £8 each, M&S X Fired Earth

Lavish leopard diffuser, £25, joebrowns.co.uk

Monochrome geometric diamond bath mat, £10, George Home

Battery lamp, £11, JYSK

Brown speckled glass jug, £18, Graham and Green

Brown speckled glass, £9.95, Graham and Green

Soap dish, £12.50, Oliver Bonas

Faux plant in rattan basket, £4, Primark

Colour CRUSH

Work these moody hues into your home

1

2

3

4

7

8

5

6

9

10

11

1 Walter printed blue velvet pendant lamp shade, £69.50, Oliver Bonas **2** Glass tealight holder, £7.99, H&M Home **3** Grand Designs Edinburgh velvet bed frame in blue, from £1,499, DFS. Similar slate bedding set, from £16, and velvet cushions, from £12 each, Dunelm **4** Valspar V&Co flat matt emulsion in Blue Shade 5, £42 for 2.5ltrs, B&Q **5** Ombré glazed ceramic vase, £3.50, Primark **6** Teal throw, £36, M&Co **7** Cotton storage basket, £22.99, H&M Home **8** Blue floral print double duvet set, £12, Primark **9** Drift mug, £4.50, Matalan **10** Quilted velvet cushion in Blue, £35, Monsoon **11** Oxhey ribbed glass plant pot, £16, Cult Furniture

COMPILED BY: ESME CLEMO

MTV has done it and the BRITs did it last year – as the awards season gets under way, and with the BAFTAs and the Oscars around the corner, we ask...

Should award categories be gender neutral?

YES

'I want to be the best person, not woman'

Lisa Johnson, 45, lives in Bedfordshire and runs her own business

In this day and age there is absolutely no reason that we need to be separated by our gender. Being a man or woman shouldn't even be a consideration when it comes down to our achievements. Surely, it's just the best person who should win the award?

If I'm the best at something, then I want that to be acknowledged, not shared with someone else. Besides, often it can seem as though 'best' in a women's category is still second-best compared with the men's winner.

And as we become more fluid as a society in our gender expression, men and women award distinctions do feel outdated. We can't force non-binary or gender non-confirming people to squeeze into categories that don't define them – that seems massively unfair. It's important that we acknowledge and validate that not everyone conforms to the idea of gender.

So drop the gender categories and just give awards to the people who deserve them – whether they're a man, a woman, non-binary or gender non-conforming.

At the end of the day, the best person is just the best person.

✣ **lisajohnson.com**

NO

'We're just going to be pushed to the wayside'

Paula Landry, 50, is a producer, author and vice president of the Pano network, which supports under-represented women, non-binary, and gender non-conforming creators in the TV, film and media industry.

Taking away gender categorisations is a bad idea. Women, non-binary and gender non-conforming people (GNC) are under-represented in the TV, film and media industry.

Having gender-specific categories is more inclusive. They hold those giving awards accountable for equal representation, as we can see exactly how many men and women are nominated and awarded.

So making everyone eligible for one 'best actor' award makes it easier for already under-represented people to be swept aside. And not just in front of the camera but behind it too.

In an ideal world we wouldn't need to be separated by gender but we're not yet in an equal society. Women, LGBTQ+, non-binary and GNC have been marginalised for so long, and removing the potentially equal footing of a category that doesn't include men means we're just going to be steamrolled and pushed to the wayside.

Already at a disadvantage in terms of being awarded – 71.1% of all Oscars nominations in the past decade went to men – gender-specific awards ensure our voices are heard.

✣ **thisbusinessoffilm.com**

WORDS: ASHLEIGH PAGE. PHOTOS: GETTY, AMANDA HUTCHINSON, CHARLES CHESSLER

CARIBBEAN ON A BUDGET

Escape to tropical sunshine on an all-inclusive deal – they're more affordable than you might think

White sand beaches. Warm sunshine. Bottomless fruity cocktails. A sultry break in the Caribbean might feel impossibly far away, but even on a budget you can make the dream real. Book an all-inclusive hotel and flight package, and your food and drink – as well as many of your activities – are included. That means you know exactly what you're spending from the outset, so you can relax on the ground. Many operators require little or no deposit and holidays can often be paid in instalments. Where to choose? How about one of these...

Varadero, Cuba

Cuba is the Caribbean's cheapest island to visit, according to Which? But despite low prices, it's big on atmosphere, blending Spanish, American and African influences across its vast landscape. Take in historic architecture and 1950s cars in capital Havana – the old city centre and its fortification system are a Unesco World Heritage Site – then kick back on one of the many fantastic beaches. Varadero has a number of all-inclusive hotels along its 20km of pristine white sands, helping you keep a cap on costs. It's also got plenty of nightlife and is just two hours from Havana.

BOOK IT Seven nights all-inclusive in Varadero from £808pp in May 2023, including flights from Manchester, loveholidays.com.

Historic Havana

Gorgeous beaches

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic

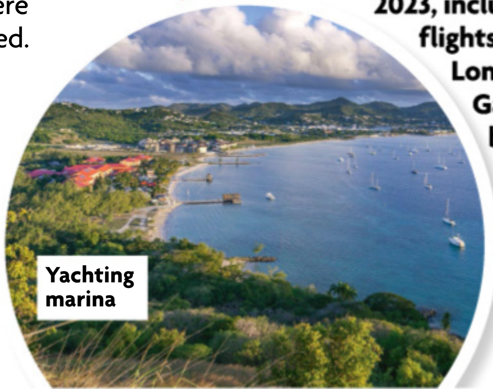
There's lots of reasons to love a holiday in the Dominican Republic – sensational palm-lined beaches and humpback whale watching, lush mountainous vistas and an abundance of coffee and cocoa grown on local plantations. But travellers on a budget will also appreciate the tropical island's friendly prices, which allow you to have an all-inclusive resort holiday without going bankrupt. Make for Punta Cana, which has many of the most popular resorts, as well as golf courses and the historic town of Higuey, where Christopher Columbus landed.

BOOK IT Seven nights all-inclusive in Punta Cana from £734pp in September 2023, including flights from London Gatwick, onthebeach.co.uk.

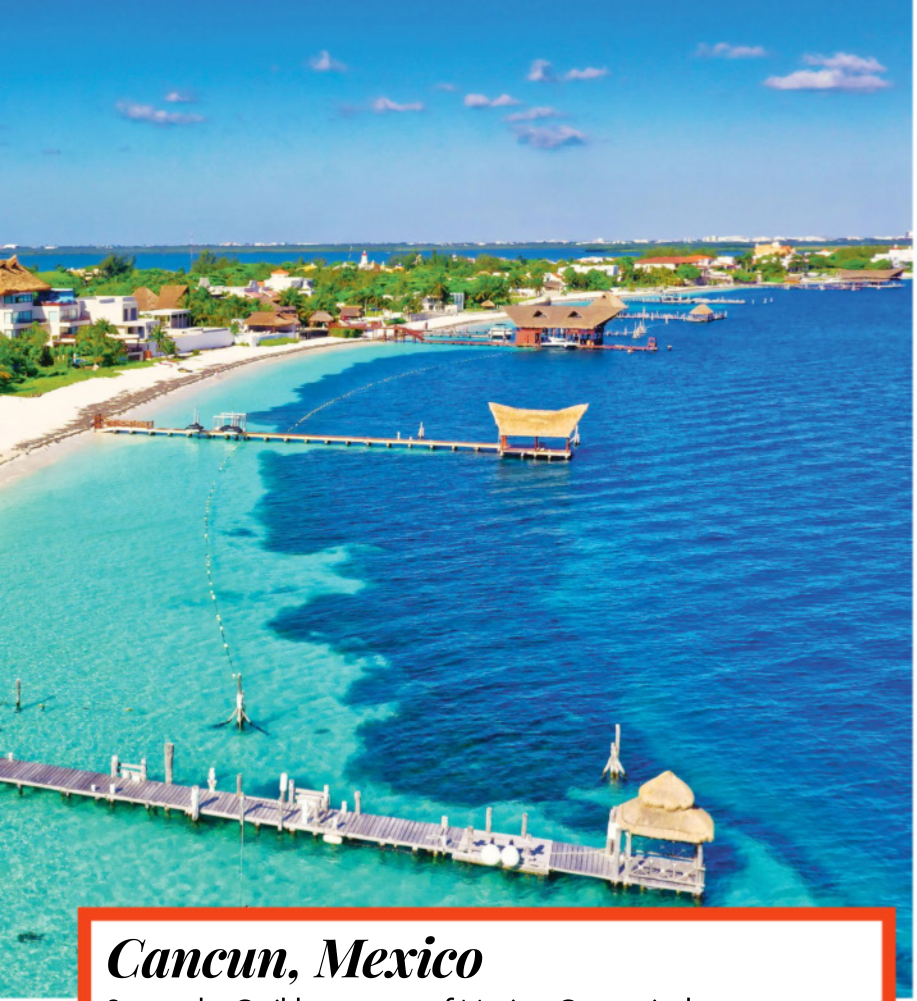
Rodney Bay, St Lucia

Set on the northwestern coast of St Lucia, Rodney Bay combines brilliant soft beaches – great for kite-surfing, snorkelling or simply sunbathing – with a lively atmosphere full of restaurants, bars and shops. The 80-acre yachting marina is one of the Caribbean's most prestigious. And there are fantastic all-inclusive resorts that cater to all needs. The hotels come with landscaped gardens, pools and bountiful pina coladas that you can sip all day long while reading a book on your lounger. In other words, it's heaven.

BOOK IT Seven nights all-inclusive nights in Rodney Bay from £1,003pp in June 2023, including flights from London Gatwick, british airways.com.



Yachting marina



Cancun, Mexico

Set on the Caribbean coast of Mexico, Cancun is the gateway to endless powdery beaches, epic Mayan ruins and sparkling natural sinkhole swimming pools (called *cenotes*). And with low-cost direct flights from the UK and plentiful resorts, it's possible to get an affordable holiday here that gives you access to all of it. Spend your days snorkelling or swimming in the vivid turquoise waters, then evenings making the most of Cancun's thrilling nightlife scene. Expect everything from taco-stuffed restaurants to clubs, spectacular theatre shows to concerts.

BOOK IT Seven nights all-inclusive in Cancun from £979pp in May 2023, including flights from Gatwick, thomascook.com.

Montego Bay, Jamaica

See the sights

Jamaica evokes all kinds of enticing images: rum punch, reggae and sandy beaches bathed with sunshine among them. You'll get all of this – plus facilities-packed resorts and short airport transfers – in the island's northwestern gateway of Montego Bay. When you've had your fill of cocktails by the pool, you're within striking distance of some of the island's best sights, including the Rocklands Bird Sanctuary and the multi-tiered waterfall at Dunn's River. Or head into the mountainous interior, where dense, lush vegetation makes you feel like you've arrived on an entirely different island.

BOOK IT Seven nights all-inclusive in Montego Bay from £1,143pp in May 2023, including flights from Manchester, firstchoice.co.uk.

✣ **Always check the latest travel advice before booking a trip**

WORDS: ALICIA MILLER. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY.
PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING

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Puzzle BREAK 1

CLUES & ARROWS

Fill in the clues in the direction of the arrows.

Having lots of money		Pacific island nation		Spiky part of a rose's stem		For what reason?		Ring up		Purifying treatment
				Place of bliss						
The Scales star sign		Make a wager		'Life imitates _'		'The King', _ Presley		Diplomacy, discretion		Close by
					Singer, _ John					
Equipment	Sign up						Tool used to chop wood			
			Small antelope		Artist, _ van Gogh		Log house		Fossil fuel	
Da Vinci portrait (4,4)	Prophet	Pinch sharply		Winner						
								In pieces, divided		Leader of a city
The Night Of actor, _ Ahmed				Harness for a horse		Soothing ointment				
									On the way through	
Stationery item (5,4)		Actor, Jamie _ Curtis				Shade of dark blue				
Building material		Connect					Brazilian city, _ de Janeiro			
						Lady Gaga film, *A _ Is Born*				

Sudoku

To solve the puzzle, each 3 x 3 box, each column and each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

3			8		2	1		
	6	1	7			2	4	9
7				9			8	
		6	2					5
	4				1			
2					4	3		
	7			1			3	
6	1	2			8		5	
		9			5			7

Wordsearch

The 'king of the knots' is a term used to refer to which knot? The answer is the one missing from the grid.

S	T	O	P	P	E	R	E	H
L	B	A	R	R	E	L	N	I
I	P	E	F	R	B	A	G	T
P	E	E	E	U	G	R	R	C
B	E	T	O	N	Z	B	A	H
R	A	D	I	A	M	O	N	D
W	I	N	D	S	O	R	N	W
B	U	M	P	E	R	L	Y	H
U	O	V	E	R	H	A	N	D

ARBOR
BARREL
BEER
BOWLINE
BUMPER
DIAMOND
DOUBLE
GRANNY
HITCH
OVERHAND
REEF
SLIP
STOPPER
WATER
WINDSOR

Puzzle solutions

■	■	C	■	L	■	S	■	A	■	■	■	B	■	■
A	D	O	R	E	■	T	O	M	O	R	R	O	W	■
S	■	N	■	G	■	A	■	I	■	E	■	N	■	P
S	U	S	T	A	I	N	■	D	R	E	S	S	E	R
I	■	U	■	T	■	D	■	■	■	L	■	A	■	A
S	I	M	M	O	N	S	■	C	H	E	M	I	S	T
T	■	E	■	■	■	T	■	H	■	C	■	■	■	T
■	■	S	E	N	T	I	M	E	N	T	A	L	■	■
F	■	■	■	O	■	L	■	L	■	■	■	A	■	O
A	B	Y	S	M	A	L	■	M	E	G	A	T	O	N
T	■	V	■	I	■	■	■	S	■	I	■	T	■	E
A	M	O	U	N	T	S	■	F	I	L	B	E	R	T
L	■	N	■	A	■	A	■	O	■	P	■	R	■	W
■	O	N	E	L	I	N	E	R	■	I	G	L	O	O
■	■	E	■	■	■	E	■	D	■	N	■	Y	■	■

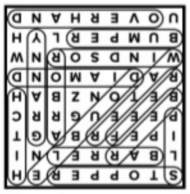
CROSSWORD

■	F	■	T	■	W	■	C	■	D	■
R	I	C	H	■	H	E	A	V	E	N
■	J	■	O	■	Y	■	L	■	T	■
L	I	B	R	A	■	E	L	T	O	N
■	■	E	N	R	O	L	■	A	X	E
K	I	T	■	T	■	V	■	C	■	A
■	■	■	G	■	V	I	C	T	O	R
M	O	N	A	L	I	S	A	■	I	■
■	R	I	Z	■	N	■	B	A	L	M
P	A	P	E	R	C	L	I	P	■	A
■	C	■	L	E	E	■	N	A	V	Y
■	L	■	L	I	N	K	■	R	I	O
C	E	M	E	N	T	■	S	T	A	R

CLUES & ARROWS

3	9	5	8	4	2	1	7	6
8	6	1	7	5	3	2	4	9
7	2	4	1	9	6	5	8	3
1	8	6	2	3	7	4	9	5
9	4	3	5	6	1	7	2	8
2	5	7	9	8	4	3	6	1
5	7	8	4	1	9	6	3	2
6	1	2	3	7	8	9	5	4
4	3	9	6	2	5	8	1	7

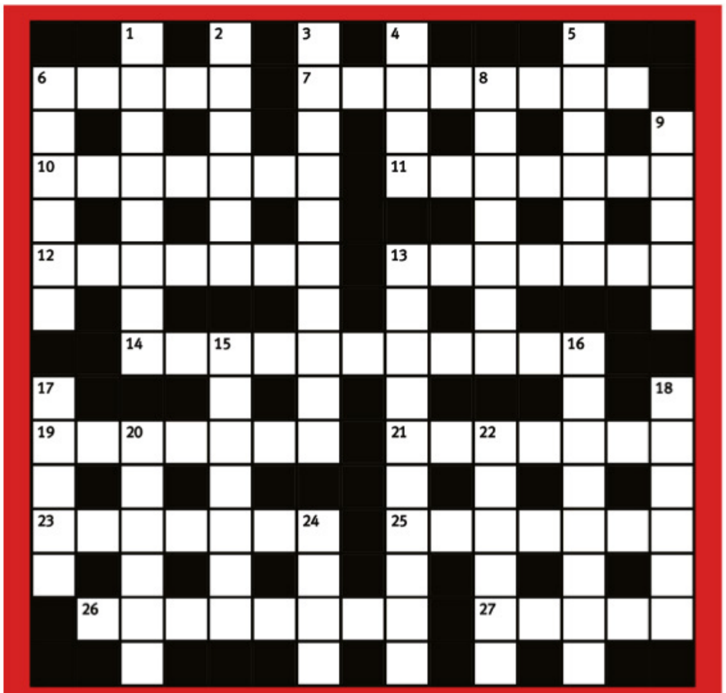
SUDOKU



S	T	O	P	P	E	R	E	H
L	B	A	R	R	E	L	N	I
I	P	E	F	R	B	A	G	T
P	E	E	E	U	G	R	R	C
B	E	T	O	N	Z	B	A	H
R	A	D	I	A	M	O	N	D
W	I	N	D	S	O	R	N	W
B	U	M	P	E	R	L	Y	H
U	O	V	E	R	H	A	N	D

WORDSEARCH
Answer: BOWLINE

WORDWISE Ennui, ensuing, ensuring, genius, genus, grunt, guest, guise, gunner, guns, gust, gutsier, insure, inure, inurn, negus, nurse, nursing, nuts, retuning, reusing, rues, ruin, rune, rung, runniest, runs, runt, ruse, rust, rusting, snug, strung, stun, stung, suet, suing, suit, suite, sung, sunnier, sure, surge, triune, true, tugs, tune, tung, tuning, turning, unit, unite, unrest, unrisen, unsent, untie, urge, urgent, urine, ursine, user, using. Answer: INSURGENT



CROSSWORD

Put your feet up and have a go at this old classic.

ACROSS

6 Love deeply (5)
7 *The* _ *War*, 2021 sci-fi film starring 12 Across, 9 Down, 20 Down & 22 Down (8)
10 Hold up under (7)
11 Kitchen sideboard (7)
12 JK _, won an Oscar for his role in the film *Whiplash* (7)
13 Shop selling medicines (7)
14 Indulging the emotions excessively (11)
19 Extremely bad, informally (7)
21 Unit of explosive power (7)
23 Quantities (7)
25 Hazelnut (7)
26 Short joke or witty remark (3-5)
27 Ice house (5)

DOWN

1 Eats or drinks (8)
2 To be played smoothly and flowingly (6)
3 Cessation of movement (10)
4 Among (4)
5 Japanese dwarf tree (6)
6 Help (6)
8 Vote back into office (2-5)
9 Chris _, actor in sitcom *Parks and Recreation* (5)
13 English town (10)
15 In name only (7)
16 Recently (8)
17 Causing death (5)
18 Wall pass in football (3-3)
20 _ Strahovski, actor in TV's *The Handmaid's Tale* (6)
22 Betty _, actor in TV comedy series *GLOW* (6)
24 Of sound mind (4)

Wordwise

E	S	T
R	U	I
N	G	N

Average = 25, more than 45 = well done

You have 15 minutes to find as many words as possible using the letters in the grid. Each word must contain four or more letters, one of which must be the central square. No proper nouns, plurals or foreign words are allowed. There is one nine-letter word in the grid – the clue is: **rebel**

3-9 January 2023

Your STARS

ASK ALEXA 'WHAT IS MY HOROSCOPE TODAY?'

Discover your destiny with Sally Morgan, our expert astrologer

ARIES

21 Mar – 20 Apr

You've been invited to family for a traditional event. It's always something special in your calendar. A neighbour needs DIY advice.

TAURUS

21 Apr – 20 May

This week heralds a new venture, as Mercury is under the power of Uranus. Find someone who'll help you bring your ideas to life.

GEMINI

21 May – 20 Jun

Let your intuition guide you and reach for your goals. If you need to enrol on a course to boost your job prospects, do so.

CANCER

21 Jun – 22 Jul

Create a space at home where you can read, relax and retreat to with a cosy blanket when your mind gets too busy.

LEO

23 Jul – 22 Aug

A TV show excites you and helps you focus on something you're hoping to achieve. A close friend turns up unexpectedly.

VIRGO

23 Aug – 22 Sep

One idea resonates deeply as you are filled with inspiration and feel you can conquer anything. This new formula is working.

LIBRA

23 Sep – 23 Oct

Friends may think your silence is due to you working hard during Venus in Aquarius. If you feel tired, be selective about socialising.

SCORPIO

24 Oct – 22 Nov

An old flame may reappear expecting a warm welcome when they broke your heart. There may be issues to resolve.

SAGITTARIUS

23 Nov – 22 Dec

There is excellent energy in the air. Look within and find helpful patterns in your life as your ruling planet is in direct motion.

CAPRICORN

23 Dec – 20 Jan

You are preparing for a challenge and know a positive mindset can move mountains. Others will be amazed at your progress.

AQUARIUS

21 Jan – 19 Feb

There's a steep learning curve attached to new experiences this week. People look to you for leadership or guidance.

PISCES

20 Feb – 20 Mar

You have lots in common with a new friend. Neptune influences family connections and reveals something you didn't know.

Puzzle BREAK 2

HALF & HALF

Manchester, Baudot, Gray and Alt are all words that can precede what word in telecommunications and computing? Cross out a letter in each square to get a grid filled with words. The uncrossed out letters in the shaded squares give the puzzle answer.

R / S	R / C	R / S	U / O	B / G
I / A		O / I		E / L
Z / T	E / O	N / B	R / O	N / A
O / E		E / I		T / D
S / R	P / I	S / N	X / C	E / S

Sudoku

To solve the puzzle, each 3 x 3 box, each row and each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

	5		9			1		6
9	4	1						
	8		1		2			4
6		8		7		2		
			6		5			
		2		1		6		3
1			3		8		6	
						9	5	1
7		9			1		8	

Bitesize

Fit the words into the grid, using the clues given across and down. The shaded squares spell out the answer.

1	2	3	4
5			
6			
7			

ACROSS
1 Garden hut (4)
5 Greek letter (4)
6 Easily heard (4)
7 __ Redding, singer (4)

DOWN
1 Grain store (4)
2 Owl's cry (4)
3 Needlecase (4)
4 Male parents (4)

Puzzle solutions

S	C	R	U	B
I	■	O	■	L
Z	E	B	R	A
E	■	I	■	D
S	I	N	C	E

HALF & HALF
Answer: CODE

A	X	L	E		L	E	A		O	G	R	E
I					I		L			A		
D	E	D	U	C	T		G	R	O	V	E	
E		A		H			E			E		S
		N		O			B	A	L	L	O	T
R	E	C	O	R	D	E	R		E			U
E		E		T			A	V	A	T	A	R
C	I	R	C	L	E	S			V			G
Y				E			B	E	E	T	L	E
C					L		E			R		O
L	I	E		L	E	A	F		L	E	A	N
E			I		V		O			N		
S	W	I	M	W	E	A	R		I	C	E	
			P		L		E			H		

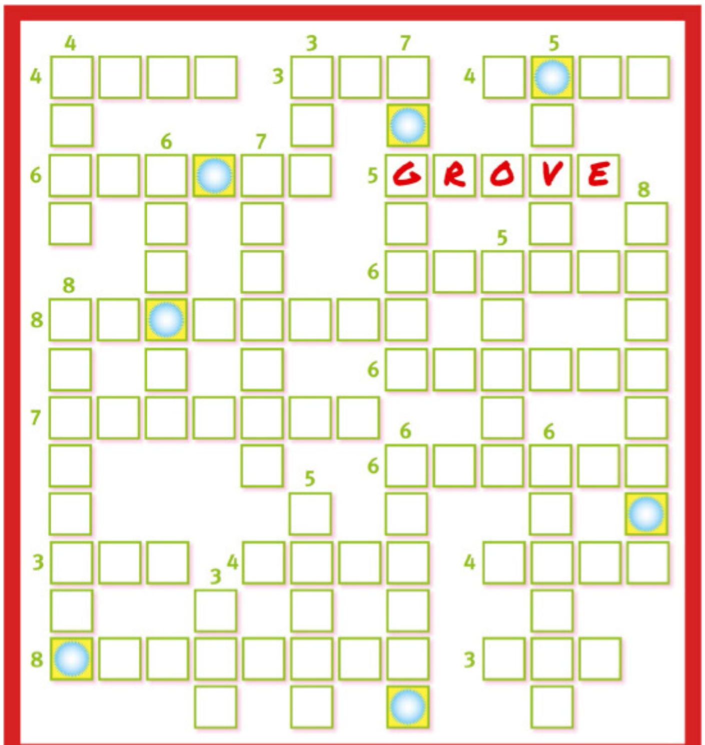
CROSSFIT
Answer: GLUCOSE

2	5	7	9	8	4	1	3	6
9	4	1	7	3	6	5	2	8
3	8	6	1	5	2	7	9	4
6	9	8	4	7	3	2	1	5
4	1	3	6	2	5	8	7	9
5	7	2	8	1	9	6	4	3
1	2	5	3	9	8	4	6	7
8	3	4	2	6	7	9	5	1
7	6	9	5	4	1	3	8	2

SUDOKU

S	H	E	D
I	O	T	A
L	O	U	D
O	T	I	S

BITESIZE
Answer: DODO



CROSSFIT

Fill in the grid using the words listed here. The highlighted letters will spell out the answer.

3 LETTERS
Ice
Imp
Lea
Lie
Lit

4 LETTERS
Aide
Axle
Leaf
Lean
Ogre

5 LETTERS
Gavel
~~Grove~~
Leave
Level

6 LETTERS
Avatar
Ballot
Beetle
Before
Dancer
Deduct
Trench

7 LETTERS
Algebra
Chortle
Circles

8 LETTERS
Recorder
Recycles
Sturgeon
Swimwear

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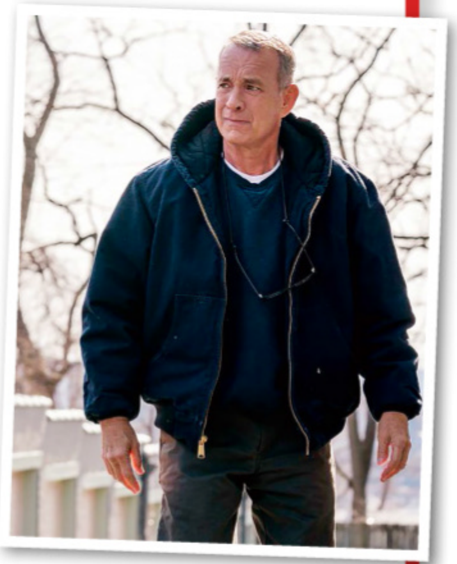
This week's HOT LIST

Films, music and events not to miss

Film



A MAN CALLED OTTO

Out 6 January

Tom Hanks plays classic curmudgeon Otto Anderson whose recent bereavement distances him from his neighbours. But as a stray cat and a friendly new arrival to the street warm Otto's heart, can he relearn to love? A snow-bound heart-warmer.

Music

RuPaul
Black Butta

RUPAUL

Black Butta (RuCo, Inc), out 6 January

Drag legend RuPaul blesses our ears once again with a 15th studio album entitled *Black Butta*. With R&B sounds and a 10-song tracklist, it'll make you want to sashay onto the dance floor and party all night long.

Events

THE COMMITMENTS UK TOUR

9 Jan – 1 Jul, multiple locations; from £13

Experience soul music like never before as Roddy Doyle's novel turned BAFTA-award winning film is brought to life on stage. With over 20 classic soul tunes – follow Jimmy and the band's journey to success while having a singalong.

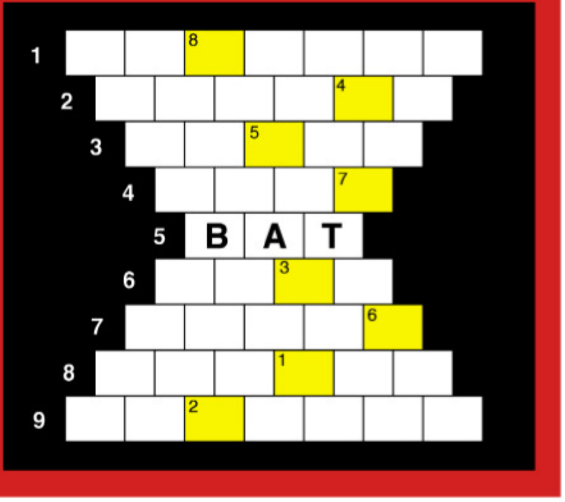
WORDS: ARIANA LONGSON. PHOTOS: ELLIE KURTTZ

Puzzle BREAK 3

BRICK TRICK

Which liqueur's name is taken from the Italian for 'little bitter'? To find out, solve the puzzle... Enter the answers to the clues in the grid. Every word is an anagram of its neighbours, plus or minus a letter. Read the shaded squares in number order for the answer.

1 Smoked herring
2 Einstein's first name
3 Goat's cry
4 Illicitly help
5 Cricket implement
6 Sharp pain
7 Explosion
8 Dark igneous rock
9 Criticise harshly

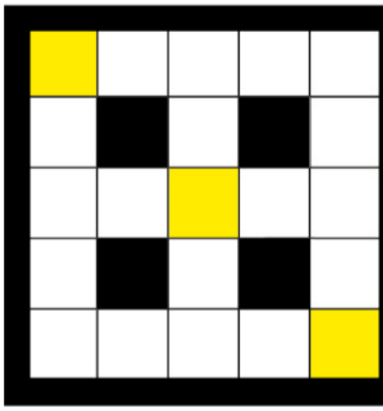


Sudoku

To solve the puzzle, each 3x3 box, each column and each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

			9	1	4			
		5				3	4	1
	4	1	2		5			
2		9		4		8		
5			1			6		
6		4				2		3
	9		4	7	2			
	5						2	8
	7				8		6	

Take three

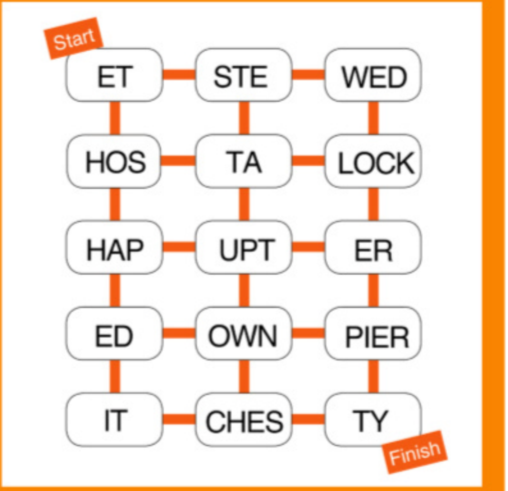


What type of animal once held a 'book signing' at a library in Cambridgeshire? To find out, solve the puzzle... The three answers in this puzzle read the same across and down. The clues are given, but not in the right order. Read down the shaded squares to spell the answer.

- Jewelled headband
- Cook meat in an oven
- Provide food

Chain words

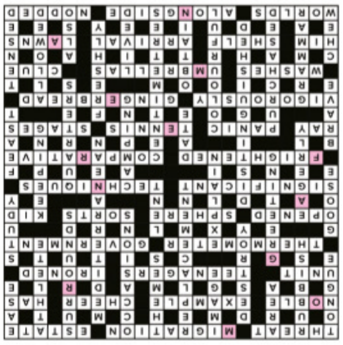
Researchers found that earlier risers were more likely to be in what mood compared to late risers? Get from Start to Finish, making words by joining two boxes together as you go, eg: ET + HOS, HOS +... you decide! When you reach Finish, two unused boxes join together to give you the answer.



Puzzle solutions

1 B L O A T E R
2 A L B E R T
3 B L E A T
4 A B E T
5 B A T
6 S T A B
7 B L A S T
8 B A S A L T
9 L A M B A S T

BRICK TRICK
Answer: AMARETTO



JUMBO CROSSWORD
Answer: MORGAN FREEMAN

3	6	8	9	1	4	5	7	2
9	2	5	8	6	7	3	4	1
7	4	1	2	3	5	9	8	6
2	3	9	5	4	6	8	1	7
5	8	7	1	2	3	6	9	4
6	1	4	7	8	9	2	5	3
8	9	6	4	7	2	1	3	5
4	5	3	6	9	1	7	2	8
1	7	2	3	5	8	4	6	9

SUDOKU

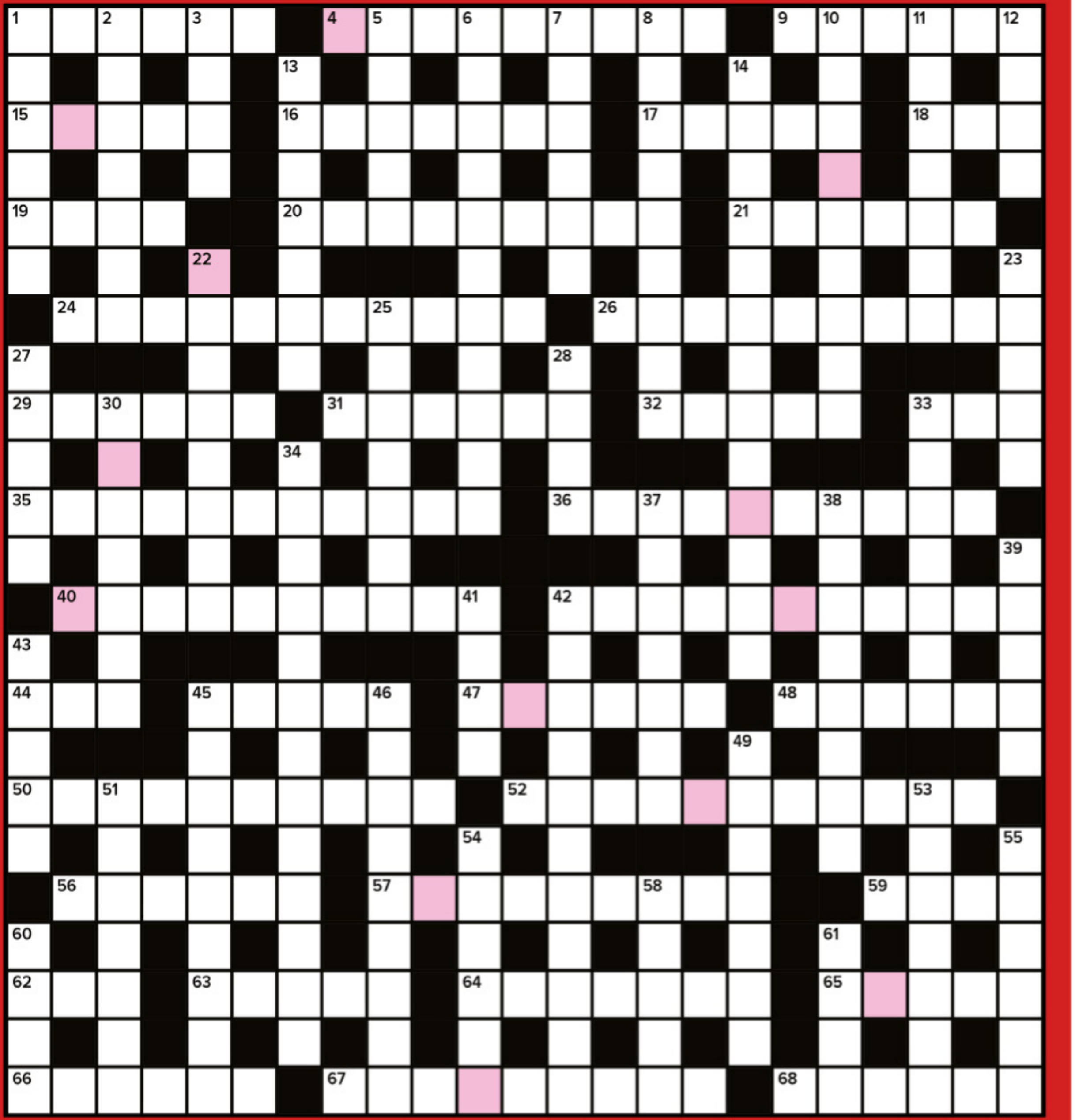
C	A	T	E	R
A		I		O
T	I	A	R	A
E		R		S
R	O	A	S	T

TAKE THREE
Answer: CAT

SOLUTION: Ethos, hosta, taste, stewed, wedlock, locker, erupt, uptown, owned, edit, itches, chesty.
ANSWER: Happier

JUMBO CROSSWORD

Read down the letters in the shaded squares to spell out a Hollywood actor (6,7).



ACROSS

1 Source of danger (6)
4 Act of settling in another country (9)
9 Landed property (6)
15 Grand or imposing (5)
16 Instance (7)
17 Applaud with shouts (5)
18 Possesses (3)
19 Military group (4)
20 Young adults (9)
21 Pressed (6)
24 Temperature gauge (11)
26 The Cabinet (10)
29 Unlocked (6)
31 Globe (6)
32 Types (5)
33 Young goat (3)
35 Meaningful (11)
36 Strategies (10)
40 Scared (10)
42 Parallel (11)
44 Soul singer, __ Charles (3)
45 Sudden fear (5)
47 Sport (6)
48 Phases (6)
50 Energetically (10)
52 Spiced cake (11)
56 Cleans (6)
57 Rain shields (9)
59 Puzzle-solving aid (4)
62 That man (3)
63 Ledge (5)
64 2016 film starring Amy Adams (7)
65 Areas of mown grass (5)
66 Classic novel, *War of the ––* (6)
67 Neighbouring (9)
68 Displayed agreement (6)

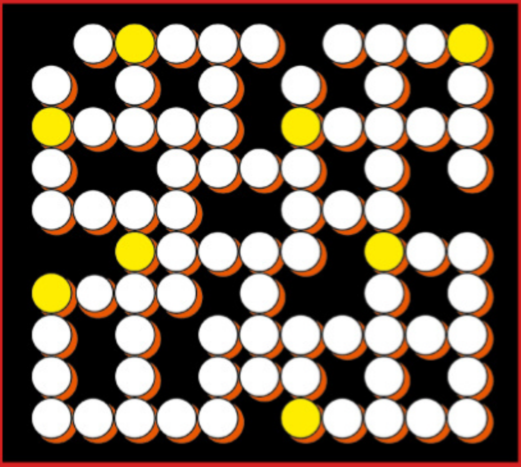
DOWN

1 Part of the mouth (6)
2 Junk (7)
3 Region (4)
5 Picture (5)
6 Substitute (11)
7 Topics (6)
8 Events (9)
10 Encompasses (9)
11 Sportsperson (7)
12 Simplicity (4)
13 Ruin (7)
14 European sea (13)
22 Words of welcome (8)
23 Analyse (5)
25 Justify (7)
27 Waterfowl (5)
28 Period before Easter (4)
30 Keenly (7)
33 Reality series, __ *Up with the Kardashians* (7)
34 Dignified (13)
37 Sleeping in tents (7)
38 Fractions (8)
39 Banquet (5)
41 Romantic appointment (4)
42 Units of measurement (11)
43 Valiant (5)
45 Bought (9)
46 Psychedelic (9)
49 Newly (7)
51 Structure of a language (7)
53 Permitted (7)
54 Gain possession of (6)
55 Tautened (6)
58 Resided (5)
60 Gnaw food (4)
61 In addition (4)

Puzzle BREAK 4

CIRCLE TIME

While most countries have official mottos that use words like 'unity' and 'peace', which country's motto is the single word 'Rain'? Fit the words into the grid, then read down the shaded circles for the answer.



3 LETTERS
ADO
ART
AWE
BUN
EAR
GOA

4 LETTERS
ALES
DEAL
GASP
NEED
NEXT
OKRA
RIND
STAG
UNDO

5 LETTERS
ABODE
ADDER
ASSAY
GAPED
SEWER
TONGA
TUDOR
TUNER
WEARY

6 LETTERS
SWEDEN

7 LETTERS
ENGLAND

10 LETTERS
NEW ZEALAND

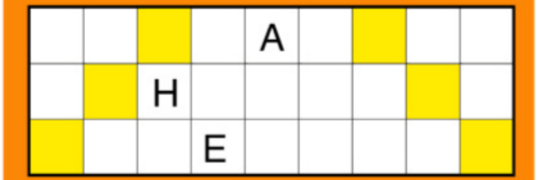
Skinny one

Which world championships, held every year near Lake Como in Italy, in 2018 attracted more than 400 entrants competing for the Golden Fig Leaf trophy? Add a letter anywhere in each of the boxed-off words to fit the clue, eg, Work hours = SIFT + H = SHIFT. Write the added letter in the space provided. Read down the added letters to spell out the answer.

SIFT		Work hours
STAR		Instrument
BRAN		Product make
GUST		Invitee
SPIN		Country
SLUG		Thrown
MEAL		Gong
WAIT		Middle
THEM		Subject
STEP		Marinate
THIN		Ponder

Three in a row

Make three nine-letter words using all of these three-letter sections and enter them in the grid as the starter letters indicate. Then make an anagram of the letters in the yellow squares to form the answer to this question: Which commonly used textile fibre is derived from the plant Gossypium?



DAT	ORY	MAN
OST	ERM	OUT
ATH	ICS	LET

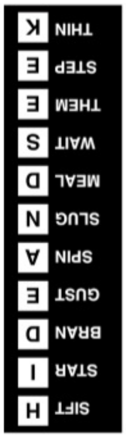
Puzzle solutions

CIRCLE TIME
Answer: BOTSWANA

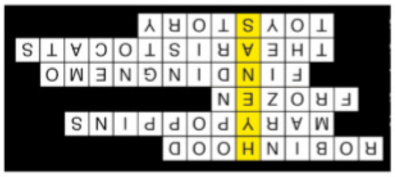
PIECEWORD
Answer: GERMANY

IN THE GRID
Answer: JOHN HANNAH

NUMBER JIG
Answer: 4,563 different ways



SKINNY ONE
Answer: HIDE AND SEE

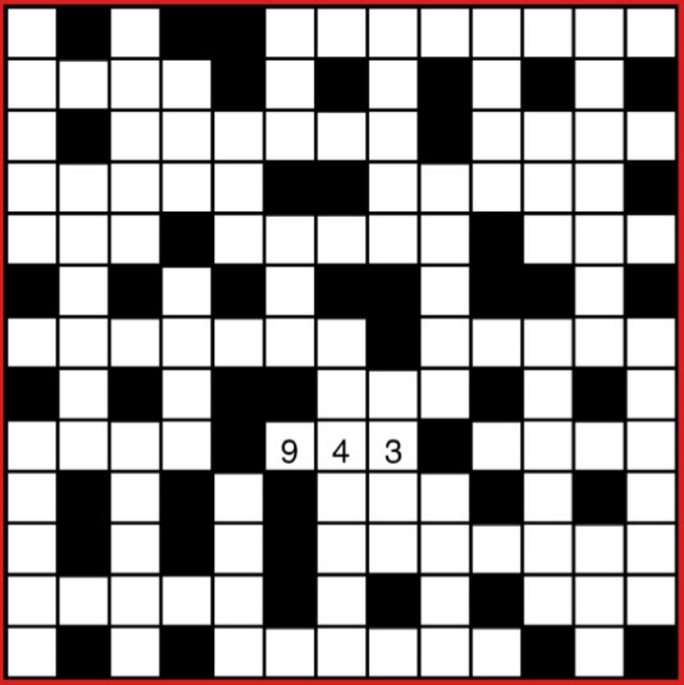


WORD JUMBLE Answer: HYENAS

THREE IN A ROW
Answer: COTTON

NUMBER JIG

Using the coins from 1 cent to $1, Americans can make $1 in 293 different ways. Using all the coins from 1p to £1, how many different ways can we make £1? Fit these numbers into the grid. One number doesn't fit. This is the answer.



3 DIGITS
139
207
392
451
545
678
694
706
840
873
~~943~~
964

4 DIGITS
1582
2186
3099
4288
4563
5740
6992
7347
8934
9782

5 DIGITS
18861
23177
39869
48216
55318
62807
66235
71927
81683
83563
91380

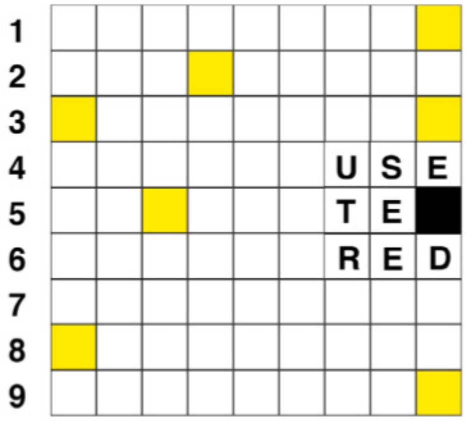
6 DIGITS
206043
307929
716264
851376
917302

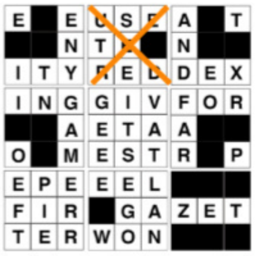
7 DIGITS
2770736
3845287
4631570
6907493

8 DIGITS
83504742

Pieceword

In which country did firefighters have to rescue an overweight rat that had got stuck in a manhole cover? The number next to the clue tells you which line the answer's in. We've put a section in to start you off! There may be two across answers in one line. Down words fill themselves in. The shaded squares spell out the one-word answer.





1 Pardoning
2 Greek letter
3 Green Italian sauce
4 Adult elver • Function
5 Newspaper
6 Came first • Crimson
7 Conical tent
8 Conifer tree
9 Manual skill

In the grid

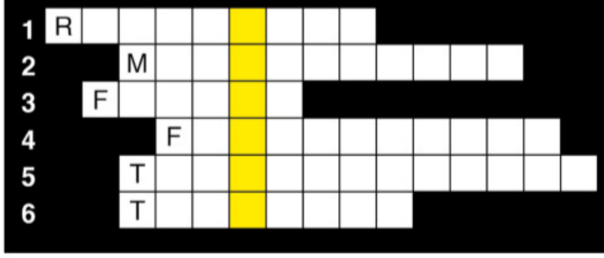
Which actor, whose surname begins with H, originally trained to be an electrician? Hidden in this grid, reading forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally, are 11 items beginning with H, one for each of the subjects given below. Find them all and the remaining letters will spell out the two-word answer.

S	J	E	S	U	O	H	H
U	H	O	S	H	E	S	A
C	E	A	N	R	A	H	M
S	A	A	M	W	O	X	M
I	R	I	D	S	I	H	O
B	T	N	N	L	T	N	C
I	A	A	E	H	O	E	K
H	H	H	A	M	P	E	R

- Hanging bed
- Food basket
- Mouse-like pet
- Launder manually
- Vital organ
- Spiral shape
- Recluse
- Shrub
- Garden tool
- Equine animal
- Residence

Word jumble

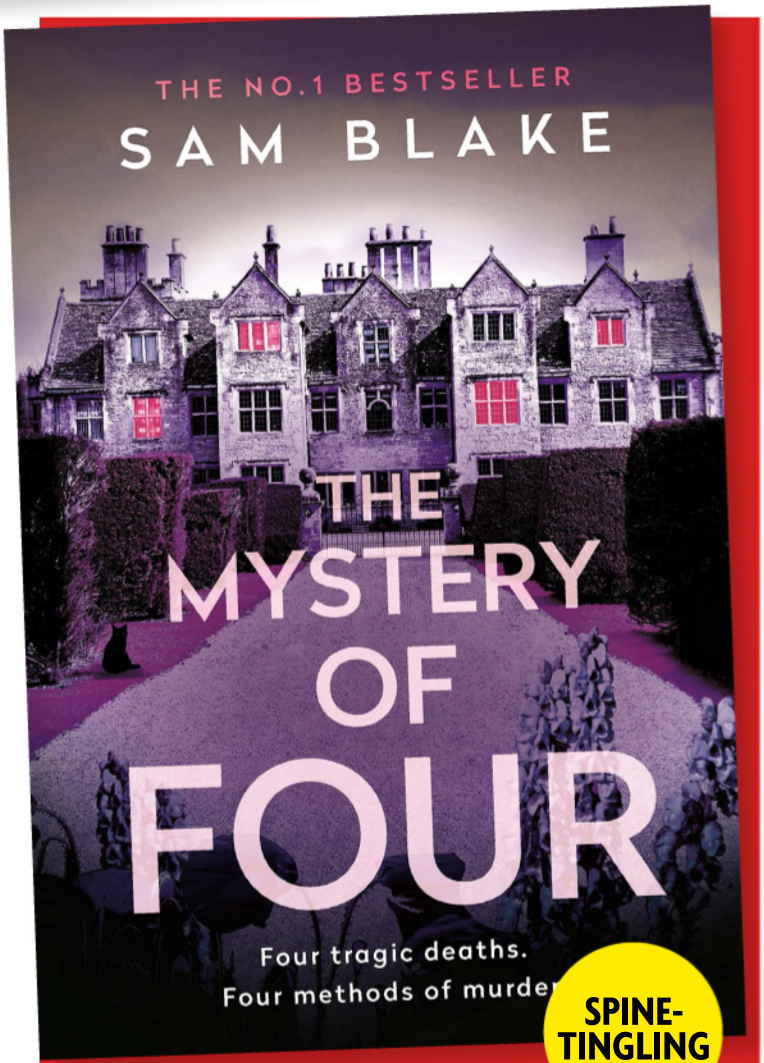
After the release of the movie *The Lion King*, a biologist tried to sue Disney for defamation of character of what? Unscramble each group of letters to discover six movies made or released by Disney that are at least part animated (with their year of release). Now fit them across the grid and you'll spell out the answer to the question.



1 Indoor hob, 1973 (5,4)
2 My prison app, 1964 (4,7)
3 Nor fez, 2013 (6)
4 Of dining men, 2003 (7,4)
5 Trace his toast, 1970 (3,10)
6 Try sooty, 1995 (3,5)

Woman's Own Book CLUB

Take some time out to relax with one of these great reads...


THE NO.1 BESTSELLER
SAM BLAKE
THE MYSTERY OF FOUR
Four tragic deaths.
Four methods of murde

SPINE-TINGLING

THE MYSTERY OF FOUR

by Sam Blake (£12.99, Atlantic Books, PB)

Seeking an escape from grief, Tess Morgan pours all her energy into her dream of restoring the stately Kilfenora House. A grand public opening is just around the corner and rehearsals for a spectacular performance in the ballroom are underway. But when a terrible accident befalls an actor, Tess' extravagant plans crumble. She pays no mind to the whispers of a curse that plagued the Tudor manor. But as the bodies begin to pile up, she is certain that a sinister force is behind the string of accidents. Somewhere out there, a cold-blooded enemy seems hell-bent on destroying everything Tess holds dear... A country-house thriller packed with twists.

WORDS: ANNABEL KEMP

MY (EXTRA) ORDINARY LIFE

by Rebecca Ryan (£8.99, Simon & Schuster, PB)

Emily is unbearably normal. After watching a documentary on the average human experience, it dawns on her. Unless she makes some drastic changes, she will likely spend her entire existence as a typical (and utterly boring) person. Having lost her twin at a young age, Emily can't help but wonder if her sister might have done things better. Determined to become extraordinary, Emily dreams up a new life for herself. But can she really swap her late-night wine and pizza binges for bungee jumping, veganism and a marathon? A sparkling novel with a relatable protagonist.

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NON-FICTION

SNOWFLAKE

by Lucy Nichol (£12.99, Welbeck, PB)

It's time to stand up to stigmas around mental health. Being vulnerable is too often seen as being an overly sensitive 'snowflake' and Nichol wants to dismantle the misconceptions. Exploring the role of pop culture, the press and social media, she breaks down stereotypes and champions the bravery of people who speak about their emotions.

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but Emily knows she wants more
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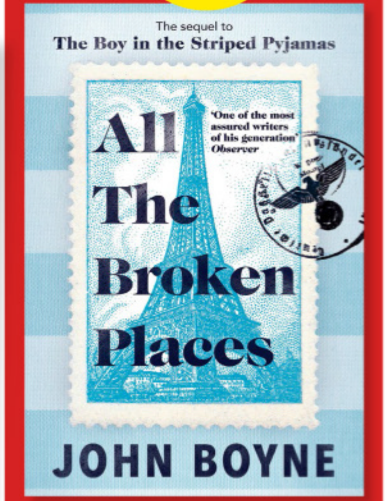
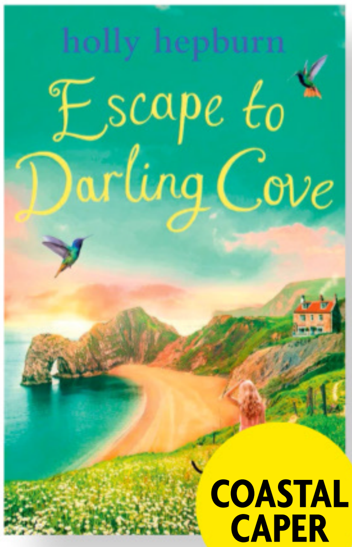
DID YOU MISS?


The sequel to The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas
All The Broken Places
'One of the most assured writers of his generation' Observer
JOHN BOYNE

ALL THE BROKEN PLACES

by John Boyne
(£20, Transworld, HB)

It's 1946. Fleeing from unspeakable tragedies, Gretel Fernsby and her mother leave Poland. But can you ever make a fresh start while haunted by the past? Eighty years later, Gretel is comfortable in her Mayfair apartment. When a family with a nine-year-old son moves into the building, memories resurface... This sequel to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is raw, unflinching and captivating.


holly hepburn
Escape to Darling Cove

COASTAL CAPER

ESCAPE TO DARLING COVE

by Holly Hepburn
(£8.99, Simon & Schuster, PB)

Eve's idyllic home is the island of Ennisfarne. She runs a small bar overlooking the windswept beach of Darling Cove, and has just rented a cottage to a newcomer. Little does Eve know that this stranger is a famous photographer, hiding from the limelight after a break-up. When the truth comes out, he'll need her help more than ever... A tender, heart-warming read.

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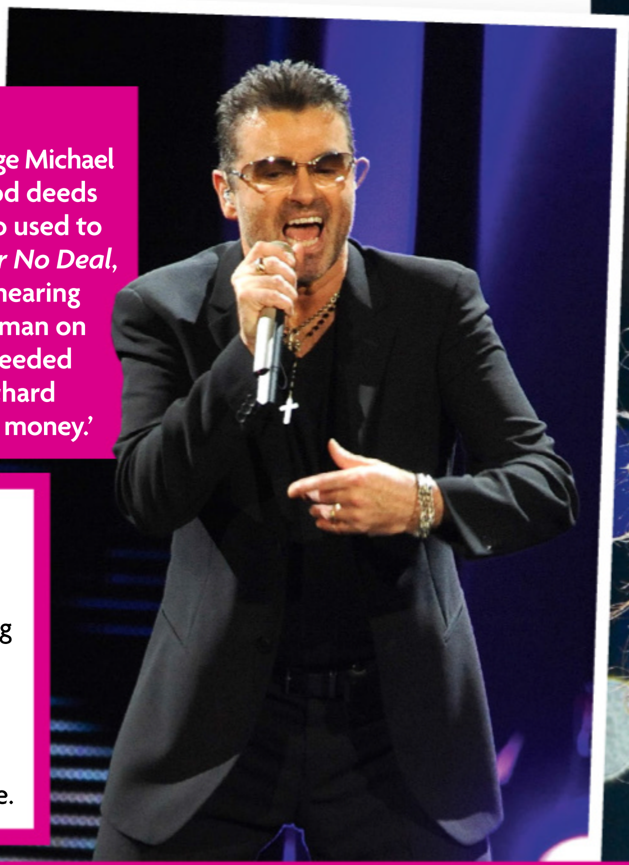
OH SO GENERO

They're rich, famous and kind to boot! We look at how these celebs give back



GIVING GEORGE

Before his death aged 53, George Michael is said to have done many good deeds in secret. Richard Osman, who used to work as a producer on *Deal or No Deal*, said George stepped in after hearing one contestant's plight. 'A woman on *Deal or No Deal* told us she needed £15,000 for IVF treatment,' Richard tweeted, 'George gave her the money.'

DOLLY'S BOOK DRIVE

Dolly Parton, 76, set up the Dollywood Foundation in 1988. It supports various charities, including the Imagination Library, which has seen 150 million books donated to children across the US. And in 2020, she gave $1 million to the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

ADELE LENDS HER VOICE

She's famous for her powerhouse vocals, and Adele, 34, has often lent her voice to good causes too. In 2017, she went to the scene of the Grenfell Tower fire to comfort victims, later dedicating her song *Hometown Glory* to them during a concert. Meanwhile, she's participated in Comic Relief and Pride London, and regularly gives money to charities including MusiCares and Sands.

ELTON'S FOUNDATIONS

It's no secret that Sir Elton John, 75, has a passion for charity. Not only does he have his eponymous AIDS Foundation, which has raised £450 million to fund AIDS/HIV programmes in 55 countries, but, in 2007, with husband David Furnish, he also set up the Elton John Charitable Trust to provide support for 100 different causes. What a man!

US

QUEEN B GIVES BACK

Beyoncé, 41, has used her millions to set up initiatives in her home town, Houston, Texas, including the Knowles-Rowland Center for Youth she built with fellow Destiny's Child singer Kelly Rowland. Her BeyGOOD foundation helped with relief for victims of 2017's Hurricane Harvey, and, with husband Jay-Z, she donated $1.5 million to the Black Lives Matter movement.

MICHAEL'S PLEDGE

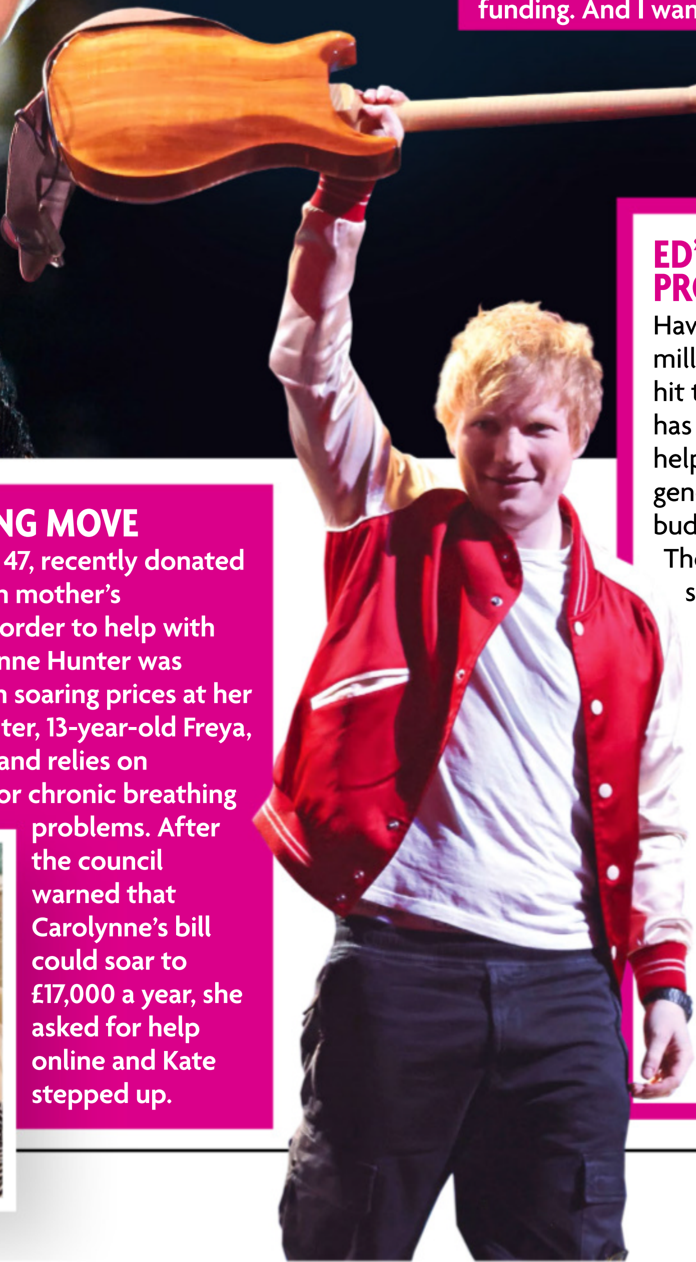
Actor Michael Sheen, 53, has declared he will become a 'not-for-profit actor', saying he'll donate the majority of his salary to charity. He said, 'I realised the difference between that child's life being a little bit better or not was ultimately a small amount of funding. And I wanted to help.'

WORDS: ANNA MATHESON, PHOTOS: GETTY, TWITTER@CAZMAC38

KATE'S WARMING MOVE

Actor Kate Winslet, 47, recently donated £17,000 to a Scottish mother's GoFundMe page in order to help with energy bills. Carolynne Hunter was asking for help with soaring prices at her home as her daughter, 13-year-old Freya, has cerebral palsy and relies on receiving oxygen for chronic breathing problems. After the council warned that Carolynne's bill could soar to £17,000 a year, she asked for help online and Kate stepped up.

Carolynne and Freya



ED'S MUSIC PROMISE

Having made millions from his hit tunes, Ed Sheeran has decided to help the next generation of budding musicians. The *Shape of You* star, 31, has already given more than £1 million to his charity, the Framlingham Foundation Trust, which helps young musicians get a start in the industry, and he reportedly has plans to give more.

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Your TV PICKS

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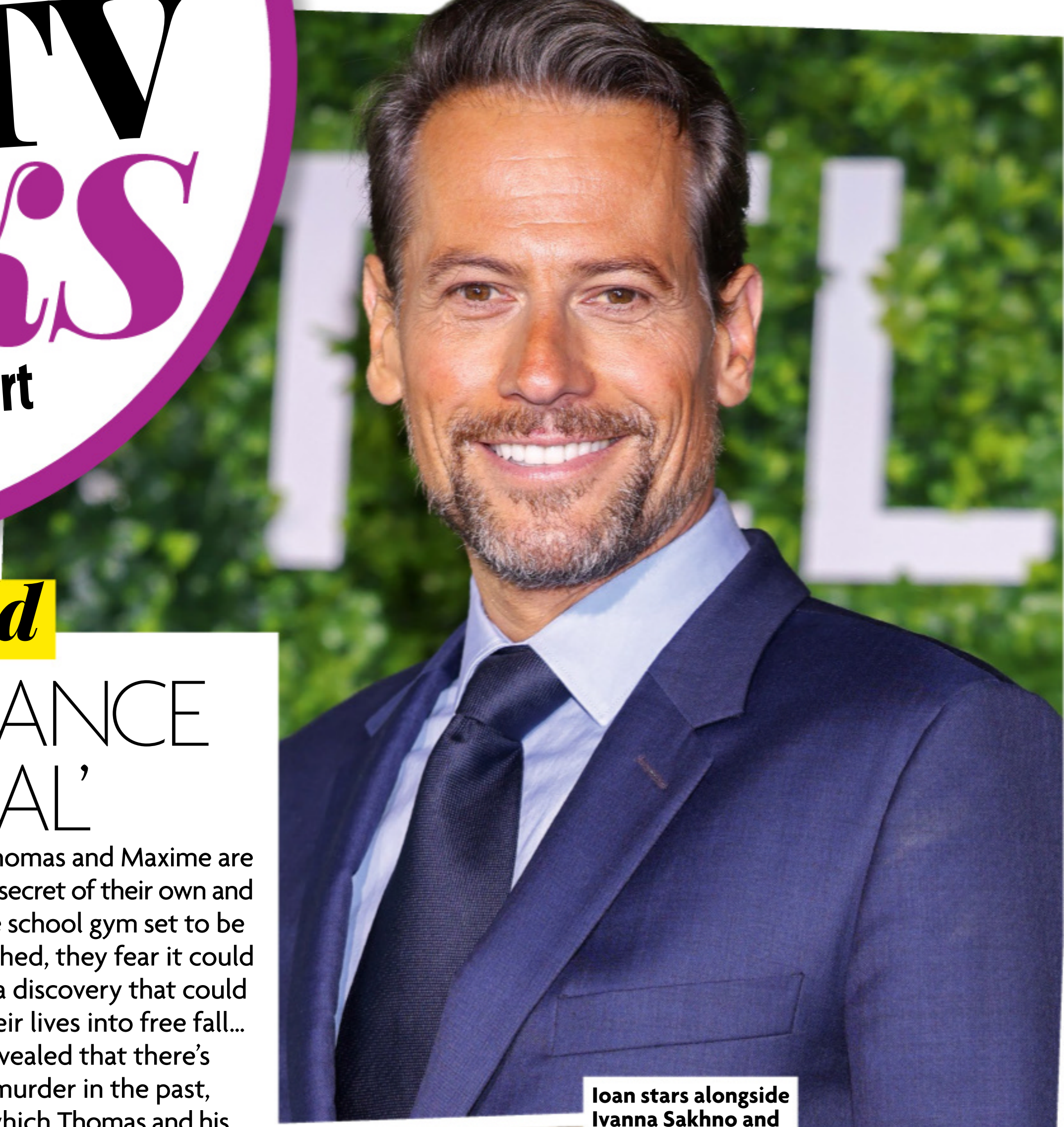

Ioan Gruffudd

'BEING IN FRANCE WAS MAGICAL'

The Welsh actor on the beautiful backdrop of new drama *The Reunion*...

Set in the South of France in the 90s, a group of teens at an Antibes international school are left stunned when their friend Vinca Rockwell (Ivanna Sakhno), vanishes.

Fast-forward 25 years and Vinca's disappearance is still a mystery. But when novelist Thomas Degalais, who was once in love with Vinca, attends his high-school reunion, he reconnects with his old friend Maxime (Grégory Fitoussi) and secrets begin to unravel.

'Thomas is still obsessed with Vinca,' says Ioan, who plays Thomas. 'I think the only way he can get some finality is by going back and trying to piece together what happened.'

But Thomas and Maxime are hiding a secret of their own and with the school gym set to be demolished, they fear it could lead to a discovery that could send their lives into free fall...

'It's revealed that there's been a murder in the past, which Thomas and his friends were involved in,' says Ioan. 'So when he returns to the South of France the mystery starts to unravel.'

'IT BLEW ME AWAY!'

Ioan says that working in that part of the world was one of things that he enjoyed most about filming the six-part drama, which also stars Dervla Kirwan and Rupert Graves.

'I'd never worked there before, so to understand it for the first time really was magical,' says Ioan. 'I was blown away by it!'

✣ ***The Reunion* is on ITVX**

Ioan stars alongside Ivanna Sakhno and Grégory Fitoussi

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Soap moment of the week

CORONATION STREET

Summer's planning to be a surrogate mum for Esther and Mike, but her three dads Billy, Paul and Todd aren't happy about it, especially when they discover that Mike isn't the person he appears to be. After

WORDS: MICHAEL DARLING. PHOTOS: BBC, GETTY, ITV, SKY. PHOTO OF RICHARD: LIZ GREGG

You liked...

***WORLD ON FIRE*, BBC1**
Sean Bean and Lesley Manville were among the cast of this drama that followed various characters across Europe during World War Two, from RAF fighter pilots to translators and US war correspondents, plus British, German and Polish families.

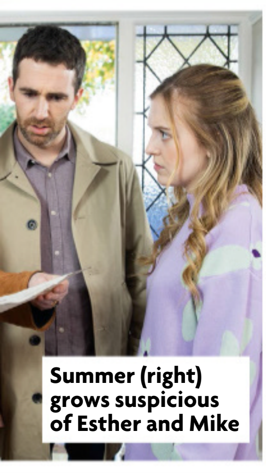
Now try...

***LEE*, SKY CINEMA**
Kate Winslet plays American photographer Lee Miller, who was at the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp during World War Two. This upcoming one-off drama also stars Alexander Skarsgård, Josh O'Connor, Andrea Riseborough and Marion Cotillard.

IT'S ON ANOTHER LEVEL!

NEXT
LEVEL
CHEF

***NEXT LEVEL CHEF*, ITV1**
Gordon Ramsay is at the helm of this new cookery competition, in which he's joined by chefs Paul Ainsworth and Nyesha Arrington. The show takes place on a set that is three storeys high and on each floor there is a kitchen space that will test the contestants' expertise as they vie to progress to the Next Level. The ultimate prize? £100k cash and a one-year mentorship under all three chefs.



Summer (right) grows suspicious of Esther and Mike

Leanne tells Billy that Mike letched after her in the Bistro, Todd discovers that Mike had an affair with someone from his old church. When Summer confronts the couple, Esther says she knows about the fling and they've moved on. But when Summer discovers another shock secret of Mike's, he locks the diabetic teenager in a room without her phone and insulin...

Richard Arnold's WEEK IN SHOWBIZ

BREAKING DAD... AGAIN!

There's no rest for Bradley Walsh. No sooner had he finished filming *The Chase* Christmas specials, he was on the road with son Barney filming another series of ITV's *Breaking Dad* – this time in South America. 'That's a lot of driving,' he tells me. The star is back in the studio later this month once again – unless Barney finally has broken his old man!

WATER BLOCKBUSTER!

It's the sequel of the highest grossing film of all time, wowing fans and critics alike with star Sigourney Weaver playing teen Kiri after the death of Dr Grace in the original *Avatar* 13 years ago. 'I was determined that I would not let my age get in the way,' says Sigourney of her brutal training for *Avatar: The Way of Water*. 'We went on a dive at night and lay back on the ocean and let the giant manta rays float over us. It was a magical experience.'

FUNNY GIRL

In Sky's hit *Rosie Molloy Gives Up Everything* with *Father Ted's* Pauline McLynn playing her mum, Sheridan Smith tells me she was thrilled to tickle her funny bones again after a series of dramatic roles. 'She's one of the funniest characters I've played. There's something of Rosie in everyone.' Sheridan also revealed she'll be taking to the stage again this year – starring in *Shirley Valentine* – after another sensational year on the small screen.

I loved catching up with Sheridan (left) and Pauline!

A LETTER TO THE MAN I LOVE

Sophie Harris, 34, has put pen to paper to thank her very special husband

WORDS: MISHAAL KHAN

Dear John,

You were born to be a dad. I know it from the way you care for our fur babies, Beatrix the cat and our Bichon Frise, Bonnie. You're the most caring man I know and I have no idea how I would've coped without you in the past few years.

When we met in 2016, I told you all about the heavy, painful periods I'd endured for years. The pill helped to keep them at bay, but when I came off contraception so we could try for a baby after our wedding in May 2018, all that changed.

STAYING POSITIVE

I'd see your concerned face as I was doubled over when the cramps hit. Every month, the pain was agonising. 'It'll be worth it when I get pregnant,' I told you.

Yet every month my period arrived, bringing us yet more heartache and agony. But you were always there to hold me when I was in pain, and your positivity kept my spirits up. 'It's going to happen this time!' you said. But I feared something was wrong. In August, my GP referred me to a consultant and in June 2019, an operation confirmed I had stage-four endometriosis. Tissue similar to that from my womb lining was on my bladder, vagina, cervix, ovaries and bowel. Doctors removed as much as they could without damaging my reproductive organs. 'Keep trying for a family, we can do a bigger operation later,' the surgeon told us.

Sophie with John during his epic run

Meanwhile, our monthly agony continued. You were my hero, rubbing my back, keeping my hot-water bottle topped up, even carrying me to the bathroom when it hurt too much to walk. Sometimes I lay on the sofa crying, and you lay beside me, holding me. 'I hate relying on you,' I sobbed. 'It's what I'm here for,' you soothed. All this was horrible for you too, helplessly watching me suffer.

So it was a blessing that you had your running. You'd head out four times a week, and I think it cleared your head. In 2019, you even finished the London Marathon and I was so proud of you.

Over the next two years, we had two rounds of IVF, but neither worked.

In July 2021, I needed more surgery, unable to cope with any more pain, and after seven hours in theatre, doctors had to remove my rectum and part of my lower bowel, leaving me with a stoma bag. Again, you were my rock as I recovered.

'I want to run to raise money and awareness for Endometriosis UK,' you said in January 2022.

HUGE ACHIEVEMENT

From Endometriosis UK's headquarters in London to the Care Fertility clinic in Liverpool, where we were having treatment, it was over 200 miles – you were going to run that distance! And after months of training, you set out in July. A crew of eight, including me, followed your route in a convoy of vans and cars, cheering you on. It took you three and a half days and the longest you slept was just two hours.

'YOU WERE GOING TO RUN 200 MILES!'

I'm so proud of you, especially as you raised an incredible £19,473. Now, as we attempt our third round of IVF, I feel positive about our future, and I know that with you beside me, I can get through anything.

Love, Sophie

✣ If you need support, visit Endometriosis UK's website, endometriosis-uk.org

John was cheered on by Sophie and dog Bonnie

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